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by

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THE WORLD
AND THORINN

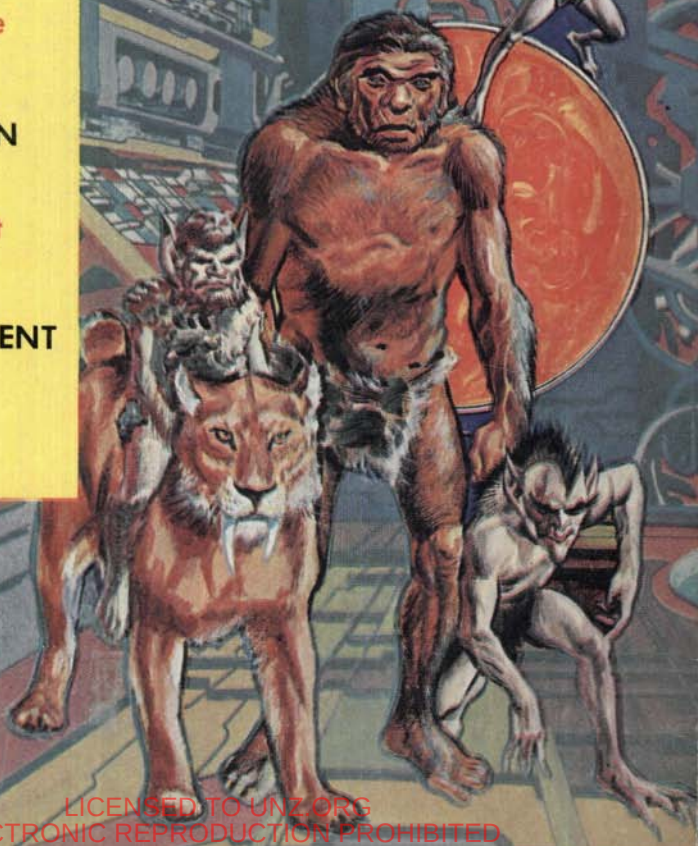
by

Damon Knight

THE RICHES
OF EMBARRASMENT

by

H. L. Gold



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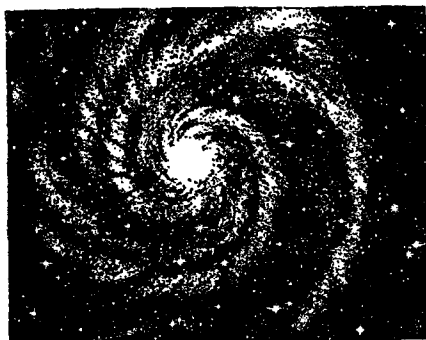
*Wind between
the Worlds*
Lester del Rey

Galaxy

MAGAZINE

ALL STORIES NEW

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YET STILL IT MOVES

In the history of science there are many heroes. Galileo, Giordano Bruno, John Tyndall . . . the roll is endless. Everyone knows the story of Galileo, for instance — how he wrote his *Dialogue on the Two World Systems*, was called to account by the Roman Inquisition for saying that the Earth moved around the sun, was compelled to recant on threat of burning and, all the same, whispered under his breath, "*Eppur si muove*" - - - "Yet still it moves!"

Of course, there's some doubt that Galileo really said that; it's the sort of story that, if it didn't really happen, it would have been necessary to invent, and as a matter of fact it seems that someone did invent that particular sotto-voce remark, because it can't be traced back much before a century after the event. But there can't be any question about Giordano Bruno. He was a Copernican — that is, he held the radical view that the Earth moved around the sun, rather than the orthodox, Ptolemaic view that the Earth stood still while the sun moved around it. He was sum-

moned before that same Inquisition. He *did* refuse to recant. And he was in fact burned at the stake as a heretic.

John Tyndall, on the other hand, got off lightly, though he must have had some exciting moments for a while. His sin against orthodoxy was to say (at a meeting of the British Royal Society) that there were no limits to what science could discover about the universe; whereupon a Londoner began an action for blasphemy against him. That was less than a century ago, in Queen Victoria's enlightened time, and probably no one was more surprised than Tyndall at the prosecution. But he was acquitted, after all, and no harm done.

Still, he stood up for what he believed, and fairly deserves a place among those heroes who championed truth against Error . . .

Or did they?

Well, there's a little problem there. As a matter of fact, things weren't quite that way. Giordano Bruno? They burned him as a heretic, all right. But not for his astronomy. He was, after all, a Dominican monk before he was

These great minds were Rosicrucians . . .



Benjamin Franklin



Isaac Newton



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an astronomer; he spent as much time arguing transubstantiation as planetary orbits, and the particular heresies for which he went to the stake were purely theological — they blamed his books for their science, but they burned his body for questions about the nature of the Trinity.

And Galileo, it is true, was called to account for saying the Earth moved around the sun. The Inquisition called that notion “philosophically false” and in other ways both wrongheaded and dangerous. It was not, however, specifically contrary to Scripture, and so it was not heresy.

What *was* contrary to Scripture, and therefore heretical, and therefore good grounds for an auto-da-fe, was Galileo’s insistence that the Sun was at rest. He could say the Earth moved if he liked, ruled the Inquisition; pernicious as it was, it was not actionable. But if he said the Sun stood still, and refused to recant, he would have to be abandoned to the secular arm, for that was heresy. . . .

And the interesting thing about that, of course, is that, heresy or not, Galileo was wrong. The sun does move. It moves, like every other particle in our revolving galaxy, at speeds and in directions that the Inquisitors never dreamed of and even Galileo

could not have guessed. But if he had stood by his faith, refused to recant and burned . . . what he would have burned for was as wrong as the views he opposed.

Are these paragraphs an attempt to prove the essential wisdom of the Inquisition, or to justify the suppression of unpopular beliefs?

Not at all. We do think there’s a moral to be drawn, but that’s not it.

Right or wrong, Galileo was less wrong than his Inquisitors in his attitudes, is not in all of his facts. For his attitude was that there is order in the universe, and that Man can, through his own senses and intellect, discover what it is, without the guidance of Divine Writ or the approval of authorities.

The cause for which Giordano Bruno burned and Galileo served his penance was not Right with a capital “R”; it was a right — the right to dissent — the right to oppose authority when authority seems in error.

That strikes us as a particularly precious right, and basic to most other rights, and one which has been often threatened in the history of the human race — more recently than the 16th century, and closer at hand than Rome.

—THE EDITOR

"WITH GOD All Things Are Possible"!

Matthew 19:26

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pression upset your life as they have so
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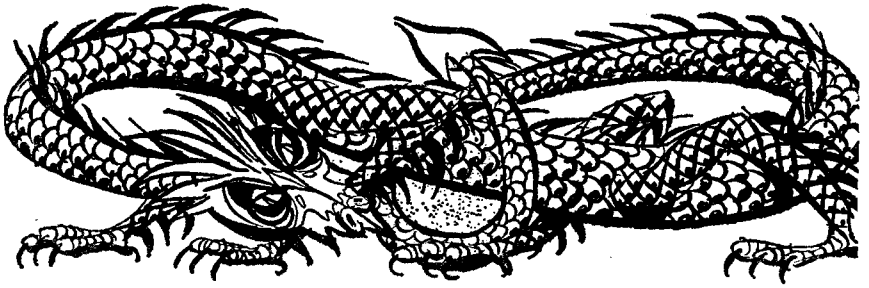
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G O B L I N R E S E R V A T I O N

by CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

Illustrated by MORROW

*In this tomorrow-world, goblins, gnomes
and ghosts were perfectly normal — but a
man returned from death surely was not!*

I

Inspector Drayton sat, solidly planted behind the desk and waited. He was a rawboned man with a face that looked as if it might have been hacked, by a dull hatchet, out of a block of gnarled wood. His eyes were points of flint, and at times they seemed to glitter and he was an-

gry and upset. But such a man, Peter Maxwell knew, would never give way to any kind of anger. There was, behind that anger, a bulldog quality that would go plodding on, undisturbed by anger.

And this was just the situation, Maxwell told himself, that he had hoped would not come about. Although, as now was evident, it

had been too much to hope. He had known, of course, that his failure to arrive at his proper destination, some six weeks before, would have created some consternation back here on the Earth; the thought that he might be able to slip home unobserved had not been realistic. And now here he was, facing this man across the desk. He'd have to take it easy.

He said to the man behind the desk: "I don't believe I entirely understand why my return to Earth should be a matter for Security. My name is Peter Maxwell, and I'm a member of the faculty of the College of Supernatural Phenomena on Wisconsin Campus. You have seen my papers"

"I am quite satisfied," said Drayton, "as to who you are. Puzzled, perhaps, but entirely satisfied. It's something else that bothers me. Professor Maxwell, would you mind telling me exactly where you've been?"

"There's not very much that I can tell you," Peter Maxwell said. "I was on a planet, but I don't know its name or its co-ordinates. It may be closer than a light-year or out beyond the Rim."

"In any event," said Drayton, "you did not arrive at the destination you indicated on your travel ticket."

"I did not," said Maxwell.

GOBLIN RESERVATION

"Can you explain what happened?"

"I can only guess. I thought that perhaps my wave pattern was diverted, perhaps intercepted and then diverted. At first I thought there had been transmitter error, but that seems impossible. The transmitters have been in use for hundreds of years. All the bugs should have been ironed out of them by now."

"You mean that you were kidnapped?"

"If you want to put it that way."

"And still will tell me nothing?"

"I have explained there's not much to tell."

"Could this planet have anything to do with the Wheelers?"

Maxwell shook his head. "I couldn't say for sure, but I don't believe it did. Certainly there was none of them around. There was no indication they had anything to do with it."

"Professor Maxwell, have you ever seen a Wheeler?"

"Once. Several years ago. One of them spent a month or two at Time. I caught sight of it one day."

"So you would know a Wheeler, if you saw one?"

"Yes, indeed," said Maxwell.

"I see you started out for one of the planets in the Coonskin system."

"There was the rumor of a dragon," Maxwell told him. "Not substantiated. In fact, the evidence was quite sketchy. But I decided it might be worth investigating."

Drayton cocked an eyebrow. "A dragon?" he demanded somewhat sarcastically.

"I suppose," said Maxwell, "that it may be hard for someone outside my field to grasp the importance of a dragon. But the fact of the matter is that there is no scrap of evidence to suggest such a creature at any time existed. This despite the fact that the dragon legend is solidly embedded in the folklore of the Earth and some of the other planets. Fairies, goblins, trolls, banshees — we have all of these, in the actual flesh. Or what passes for flesh. But no trace of a dragon. The funny thing about it is that the legend here on Earth is not basically a human legend. The Little Folk have the dragon legend as well. I sometimes think they may have been the ones who transmitted it to us. But the legend only. There is no evidence"

He stopped, feeling a little silly. What could this stolid policeman who sat across the desk care about the dragon legend?

"I'm sorry, Inspector," he said. "I let my enthusiasm for a favorite subject run away with me."

"I have heard it said that the dragon legend might have risen from ancestral memories of the dinosaur."

"I have heard it, too," said Maxwell, "but it seems impossible. The dinosaurs were extinct long before mankind had evolved."

"Then the Little Folk"

"Possibly," said Maxwell. "But it seems unlikely. I know the Little Folk and have talked with them about it. They are ancient, certainly much more ancient than we humans, but there is no indication they go back as far as the Cretaceous. Or if they do, they have no memory of it. And I would think that their legends and folk tales would easily carry over some millions of years. They are extremely long-lived, not quite immortal, but almost, and in a situation such as that, mouth-to-mouth tradition would be most persistent."

Drayton gestured, brushing away the dragons and the Little Folk. "You started for the Coonskin," he said, "and you didn't get there."

"That is right. There was this other planet. A roofed-in, crystal planet."

"Crystal?"

"Some sort of stone. Quartz, perhaps. Although I can't be sure. It could be metal. There was some metal there."

Drayton asked smoothly. "You wouldn't have known when you started out that you'd wind up on this planet?"

"If it's collusion you have in mind," said Maxwell, "you're very far afield. I was quite surprised. But it seems you aren't. You were waiting here for me."

"Not particularly surprised," said Drayton. "It has happened twice before."

"Then you probably know about the planet."

"Nothing about it," said Drayton. "Simply that there's a planet out there somewhere, operating an unregistered transmitter and receiver, and communicating by an unlisted signal. When the operator here at Wisconsin Station picked up their signal for transmittal, he signaled them to wait, that the receivers all were busy. Then he got in touch with me."

"The other two?"

"Both of them right here. Both tabbed for Wisconsin Station."

"But if they got back"

"That's the thing," said Drayton. "They didn't. Oh, I guess you could say they did, but we couldn't talk with them. The wave pattern turned out faulty. They were put back together wrong. They were all messed up. Both of them were aliens, but so tangled up we had a hard time learning who they might have been. We're still not positive."

GOBLIN RESERVATION

"Dead?"

"Dead? Certainly. A rather frightful business. You're a lucky man."

Maxwell, with some difficulty, suppressed a shudder. "Yes, I suppose I am," he said.

"You'd think," said Drayton, "that anyone who messed around with matter transmission would make sure they knew how it is done. There's no telling how many they may have picked up who came out wrong in their receiving station."

"But you would know," Maxwell pointed out. "You'd know if there had been any losses. A station would report back immediately if a traveler failed to arrive on schedule."

"That's the funny thing about it," Drayton told him. "There have been no losses. We're pretty sure the two aliens who came back dead to us got where they were going, for there's no one missing."

"But I started out for Coonskin. Surely they reported"

Then he stopped as the thought struck him, struck him straight between the eyes.

Drayton nodded slowly. "I thought you would catch on. Peter Maxwell — one Peter Maxwell — got to the Coonskin system and came back to Earth almost a month ago."

"There must be some mistake."

For it was unthinkable that there should be two of him, that another Peter Maxwell, identical in all details, existed on the Earth.

"No mistake," said Drayton. "Not the way we have it figured. This other planet doesn't divert the pattern. What it does is copy it."

"Then there could be two of me! There could be —"

"Not any more," said Drayton. "You're the only one. About a week after he returned, there was an accident. Peter Maxwell's dead."

II

Around the corner from the tiny room where he'd met with Drayton, Maxwell found a vacant row of seats. He sat down in one of them carefully, placing his single piece of luggage on the floor beside him.

It was incredible, he told himself. Incredible that there should have been two Pete Maxwells and now one of those Maxwells dead. Incredible that the crystal planet could have had equipment that would reach out and copy a wave pattern traveling faster than the speed of light — much faster than the speed of light, for at no point in the galaxy so far linked by the matter transmitters was there any noticeable lag between the time

of transmittal and arrival. Diversion — yes, perhaps there could be diversion, a reaching out and a snatching of the pattern, but the task of copying such a pattern would be something else entirely.

Two incredibles, he thought. Two things that should not have happened. Although if one of them had happened, the other surely followed. If the pattern had been copied, there would, quite necessarily, have been two of him, the one who went to the Coonskin system and the other who'd gone to the crystal planet. But if this other Peter Maxwell had really gone to Coonskin, he should still be there or only now returning. He had planned a six weeks' stay at least, longer if more time seemed necessary to run down the dragon business.

He found that his hands were shaking. Ashamed, he clasped them hard together and held them in his lap.

He couldn't go to pieces, he told himself. No matter what might be facing him, he had to see it through. And there was no evidence, no solid evidence. All that he had was what a member of Security had told him, and he couldn't count on that. It could be no more than a clumsy piece of police trickery designed to shake him into talking. Although it could have happened. It just could have happened!

But even if it had happened, he still had to see it through. For he had a job to do, and one he must not bungle.

Now the job might be made the harder by someone watching him, although he could not be sure there'd be someone watching. It might not make any difference. His hardest job would be to get an appointment with Andrew Arnold. The president of a planetary university would not be an easy man to see. He would have more with which to concern himself than listening to what an associate professor had to say. Especially when that professor could not spell out in advance detail what he wished to talk about.

His hands had stopped trembling, but he still kept them tightly clasped. In just a little while he'd get out of here and go down to the roadway, where he'd find himself a seat on one of the inner, faster belts. In an hour or so he'd be back on the old home campus and then he'd soon find out if what Drayton said was true. And he'd be back with friends again — with Alley Oop and Ghost, with Harlow Sharp and Allen Preston and all the rest of them. There'd be rowdy midnight drinking bouts at the Pig & Whistle and long, slow walks along the shaded malls and canoeing on the lake. There'd be discussion and

GOBLIN RESERVATION

argument and the telling of old tales, and the leisurely academic routine that gave one time to live.

He found himself looking forward to the trip, for the roadway ran along the hills of Goblin Reservation. Not that there were only goblins there. There were many other kinds of the Little Folk, and they all were friends of his. Or at least most of them were friends. Trolls at times could be exasperating. And it was rough to build up any real and lasting friendship with a creature like a banshee.

This time of year, he thought, the hills would be beautiful. It had been late summer when he'd left for the Coonskin system, and the hills still had worn their mantle of dark green; but now, in the middle of October, they would have burst into the full color of their autumn dress. There'd be the winy red of oak and the brilliant red and yellow of the maples, and here and there the flaming scarlet of creeping vines would run like a thread through all the other colors, and the air would smell like cider, that strange, intoxicating scent that came upon the woods only with the dying of the leaves.

He sat there, thinking of the time, just two summers past, when he and Mr. O'Toole had gone on a canoe trip up the

13

river, into the northern wilderness, hoping that somewhere along the way they might make some sort of contact with the spirits recorded in the old Ojibway legends. They had floated on the glass-clear waters and built their fires at night on the edges of the dark pine forests; they had caught their fish for supper and hunted down the wild flowers hidden in the forest glades and spied on many animals and birds and had a good vacation. But they had seen no spirits, which was not surprising. Very few contacts had been made with the Little Folk of North America, for they were truly creatures of the wilds, unlike the semi-civilized, human-accustomed sprites of Europe.

The chair in which he sat faced the west, and through the towering walls of glass he could see across the river to the bluffs that rose along the border of the ancient state of Iowa — great, dark purple masses rimmed by a pale blue autumn sky. Atop one of the bluffs he could make out the lighter bulk of the College of Thaumaturgy, staffed in large part by the octopoid creatures from Centaurus. Looking at those faint outlines of the buildings, he recalled that he had often promised himself he'd attend one of their summer seminars, but had never got around to doing it.

He reached out and shifted his luggage, preparing to get up, but he stayed sitting there. He still was a little short of breath, and his legs seemed weak. What Drayton had told him, he realized, had hit him harder than he'd thought. It still was hitting him in a series of delayed reactions. He'd have to take it easy, he told himself. He couldn't get the wind up. It might not be true; it probably wasn't true. There was no sense in getting too concerned about it until he'd had the chance to find out for himself.

Slowly he got to his feet and reached down to pick up his luggage, but hesitated for a moment to plunge into the hurried confusion of the waiting room. People — alien and human — were hurrying purposefully or stood about in little knots and clusters. An old, white-bearded man, dressed in stately black — a professor by the looks of him, thought Maxwell — was surrounded by a group of students who had to come to see him off. A family of reptilians sprawled in a group of loungers set aside for people such as they, not built for sitting. The two adults lay quietly, facing one another and talking softly, with the hissing overtones that marked reptilian speech, while the youngsters crawled over and under the loungers and sprawled on the floor in play. In

GALAXY

one corner of a tiny alcove a beer-barrel creature, lying on its side, rolled gently back and forth, from one wall to the other, rolling back and forth in the same spirit, and perhaps for the same purpose, a man would pace the floor. Two spidery creatures, their bodies more like grotesque matchstick creations than honest flesh and blood, squatted facing one another. They had marked off upon the floor, with a piece of chalk, some sort of crude game-board and had placed about upon it a number of strangely shaped pieces, which they were moving rapidly about, squeaking in excitement as the game developed.

Wheelers? Drayton had asked. Was there any tie-up with the crystal planet and the Wheelers?

It always was the Wheelers, thought Maxwell. An obsession with the Wheelers. And perhaps with reason, although one could not be sure. For there was little known of them. They loomed darkly, far in space, another great cultural group pushing out across the galaxy, coming into ragged contact along a far-flung frontier line with the punishing human culture.

Standing there, he recalled that first and only time he had ever seen a Wheeler — a student who had come from the College of Comparative Anatomy in Rio de

GOBLIN RESERVATION

Janeiro for a two-week seminar at Time College. Wisconsin Campus, he remembered, had been quietly agog. There had been a lot of talk, but very little opportunity to gain a glimpse of the fabled creature, since it stayed closely within the seminar confines. He had met it, trundling along a corridor, when he'd gone across the mall to have lunch with Harlow Sharp, and he recalled that he'd been shocked.

It had been the wheels, he told himself. No other creature in the known galaxy came equipped with wheels. It had been a pudgy creature, a roly-poly suspended between two wheels, the hubs of which projected from its body somewhere near its middle. The wheels were encased in fur, and the rims of them were horny callouses. The downward bulge of the roly-poly body sagged beneath the axle of the wheels like a bulging sack. But the worst of it, he saw when he came nearer, was that this sagging portion of the body was transparent and filled with a mass of writhing things which made one think of a pail of gaily colored worms.

And those writhing objects in that obscene and chise belly, Maxwell knew, were, if not worms, at least some kind of insect, or a form of life which could equate with that form of life on Earth which men knew as insects.

For the Wheelers were a hive mechanism, a culture made up of many such hive mechanisms, a population of colonies of insects, or at least the equivalent of insects.

And with a population of that sort, the tales of terror which came from the far and rough frontier about the Wheelers were not hard to understand. And if these horror tales were true, then man here faced, for the first time since his drive out into space, that hypothetical enemy which it always had been presumed would be met somewhere in space.

Throughout the galaxy, man had met many other strange and, at times, fearsome creatures. But none could match fearsomeness with a creature that was a wheel-driven hive of insects. There was something about the whole idea that made one want to gag.

Today outlandish creatures flocked to the Earth in thousands, to attend the many colleges, to staff the faculties that made up that great galactic university which had taken over Earth. And in time, perhaps, the Wheelers might be added to this galactic population which swarmed the colleges of Earth — if only there could be some kind of understanding contact. But so far there hadn't been.

Why was it, Maxwell wondered, that the very idea of the Wheelers went against the grain when man and all the other creatures in the galaxy contacted by the humans had learned to live with one another?

Here, in this waiting room, one could see a cross-section of them — the hoppers, the creepers, the crawlers, the wrigglers and rollers that came from the many planets from so many stars. Earth was the galactic melting pot, he thought, a place where beings from the thousand stars met and mingled to share their thoughts and cultures.

"Number 5692," shrilled the loudspeaker. "Passenger No. 56-92, your departure time is only five minutes from now. Cubicle 37. Passenger 5692, please report immediately to Cubicle 37."

And where, Maxwell wondered, might No. 5692 be bound? To the jungles of Headache No. 2, to the grim, wind-swept glacial cities of Misery IV, to the desert planets of the Slaughter Suns, or to any of the other of the thousands of planets, all less than a heartbeat away from this very spot he stood, now linked by the transmitter system, but representing in the past long years of exploratory effort as discovery ships beat through the dark of everlasting space. As they were beating out there even now, slowly and pain-

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fully expanding the perimeter of man's known universe.

The sounds of the waiting room boomed and muttered, with the frantic paging of late or missing passengers, with the hollow buzz of a hundred different tongues spoken in a thousand different throats, with the shuffling or the clicking or the clop of feet across the floor.

He reached down and picked up his luggage, turned toward the entrance.

After no more than three steps, he was halted to make way for a truck carrying a tank filled with a murky liquid. Through the cloudiness of the liquid, he caught a suggestion of the outrageous shape that lurked within the tank — some creature from one of the liquid planets, perhaps, and one where the liquid was not water. Here, more than likely, as a visiting professor, perhaps to one of the colleges of philosophy, or maybe one of the science institutes.

The truck and its tank out of the way, he went on and reached the entrance, stepped through the opening onto the beautifully paved and terraced esplanade, along the bottom of which ran the roadway belts. He was gratified to notice that there were no waiting lines, as often was the case, recently.

He drew a deep breath of air
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into his lungs — clean, pure air with the sharp tang of frosty autumn in it. It was a welcome thing after the weeks of dead and musty air upon the crystal planet.

He turned to go down the steps, and as he did he saw the sign-board just beyond the gate to the roadway belts. The sign was large, and the lettering was in Old English, screaming with solid dignity:

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, ESQ.
Of Stratford-on-Avon, England
"How It Happened I Did Not
Write The Plays"

Under the sponsorship of Time College
Oct. 22, 8 p.m. Time Museum Auditorium
Tickets available at all agencies

"Maxwell," someone shouted, and he swung around. A man was running toward him from the entrance.

Maxwell put down his luggage, half-raised his hand in greeting and acknowledgment, then slowly dropped it, for he realized that he did not recognize the man.

The man slowed to a trot, then a rapid walk.

"Professor Maxwell, isn't it?" he asked as he came up. "I'm sure I'm not mistaken."

Maxwell nodded stiffly, just a bit embarrassed.

"Monty Churchill," said the man, thrusting out his hand. "We met, a year or so ago. At one of Nancy Clayton's bashes."

"How are you, Churchill?" Maxwell asked, a little frostily.

For now he did recognize the man, the name at least if not the face. A lawyer, he supposed, but he wasn't sure. Doing business, if he recalled correctly, as a public relations man, a fixer. One of that tribe which handled things for clients, for anyone who could put up a fee.

"Why, I'm fine," said Churchill, happily. "Just back from a trip. A short one. But it's good to be back again. There's nothing quite like home. That's why I yelled out at you. First familiar face I've seen for several weeks, at least."

"I'm glad you did," said Maxwell.

"You going back to the campus?"

"Yes. I was heading for the roadway."

"No need of that," said Churchill. "I have my flier here. Parked on the strip out back. There's room for both of us. Get there a good deal faster."

Maxwell hesitated. He didn't like the man, but what Churchill said was true; they would get there faster. And he was anxious to get back as quickly as he could, for there were things that needed checking out.

"That's very kind of you," he said. "If you're sure you have the room."

III

The motor sputtered and went dead. The jets hummed for a second and then fell silent. The air sighed shrilly against the metal hide.

Maxwell glanced swiftly at the man beside him. Churchill sat stiff — perhaps in fear, perhaps only in astonishment. For even Maxwell realized that a thing like this should not have happened. In fact, it was unthinkable. Fliers such as the one in which they rode were foolproof.

Below them lay the jagged rocks of the craggy cliffs, the spearlike, upthrusting branches of the forest covering the hills, clinging to the rocks. To the left the river ran, a silver ribbon through the wooded bottom lands.

Time seemed to drag, to lengthen out, as if by some strange magic each second had become a minute. And with the lengthening of time came a quiet awareness of what was about to happen as if it might be happening to someone else, Maxwell told himself, and not to him, a factual and dispassionate assessment of the situation by an observer who was not involved. And even as he knew this, he also knew, in a dim, far corner of his mind, panic would come later; and when that came, time would take up its usual pace again as the flier rushed

down to meet the forest and the rock.

Leaning forward, he scanned the terrain that stretched ahead, and as he did he caught sight of the tiny opening in the forest, a rift in the dark ranks of the trees and the hint of green beneath.

He nudged Churchill, pointing. Churchill, looking where he pointed, nodded and moved the wheel, slowly, carefully, tentatively, as if he were feeling for some response of the craft, trying to determine if it would respond.

The flier tilted slightly, wheeled and swung, still falling slowly, but jockeying for position. For a moment it seemed to balk at the controls, then slid sideways, losing altitude more rapidly, but gliding down toward the rift between the trees.

Now the trees rushed upward at them and, close above them, Maxwell could see the autumn color of them — no longer simply dark, but a mass of red and gold and brown. Long, slender spears of red reached up to stab them, claw-like hands of gold grasped at them with an angry clutch.

The plane brushed the topmost branches of an oak, seemed to hesitate, almost to hang there in midair, then was gliding in, mushing toward a landing on the small greensward that lay within the forest.

A fairy green Maxwell told
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himself — a dancing place for fairies. But now a landing field.

He switched his head sidewise for a second, saw Churchill crouched at the controls, then switched back again and watched the green come up.

It should be smooth, he told himself. There should be no bumps or holes or hummocks. For at the time the green had been laid down the blueprints would have called for smoothness.

The craft hit and bounced and for a terrifying moment teetered in the air. Then it was down again and running smoothly on the green. The trees at the far end of the grass were rushing at them, coming up too fast.

"Hang on!" Churchill shouted and even as he shouted, the plane swung and pivoted, skidding. It came to rest a dozen feet from the woods that rimmed the green.

They sat in deadly silence, a silence that seemed to be closing in on them from the colored forest and the rocky bluffs.

Churchill spoke out of the silence. "That was close," he said.

He reached up and slid back the canopy and got out. Maxwell followed him.

"I can't understand what happened," Churchill said. "This job has more fail-safe circuitry built into it than you can imagine. Get hit by lightning, sure; run

into a mountain, yes, you can do that; get caught in turbulence and bounced around, all of this could happen, but the motor never quits. The only way to stop it is to turn it off."

He lifted his arm and mopped his brow with his already soggy shirt sleeve.

"Did you know about this place?" he asked.

Maxwell shook his head. "Not this particular place. I knew there were such places. When the reservation was laid out and landscaped, the planning called for greens. Places where the fairies dance, you know. I wasn't looking for anything, exactly, but when I saw the opening in the trees I could guess what might be down here."

"When you showed it to me," said Churchill, "I just hoped you knew what you were doing. There seemed to be no place else to go, so I did some gambling —"

Maxwell raised his hand to silence him. "What was that?" he asked.

"Sounds like a horse," said Churchill. "Who in the world would be out here with a horse? It comes from up that way."

The clattering and the clopping was coming closer.

They stepped around the flier and when they did, they saw the trail that led up to a sharp and narrow ridge, with the massive

bulk of a ruined castle perched atop the ridge.

The horse was coming down the trail at a sloppy gallop. Bestriding it was a small and dumpy figure that bounced most amazingly with each motion of its mount. It was a far from graceful rider, with its elbows thrust out on either side of it, flapping like a pair of wings.

The horse came tearing down the slope and swung out on the green. It was no more graceful than its rider; but a shaggy plow horse and its mighty hoofs, beating like great hammers, tore up clods of turf and flung them far behind it. It came straight at the flier, almost as if intent on running over it, then at the last moment wheeled clumsily and came to a shuddering halt, to stand with its sides heaving in and out like bellows and snorting through its flabby nostrils.

Its rider slid awkwardly off its back and, when he hit the ground, exploded in a gust of wrath.

"It is them no-good bummers!" he shouted. "It is them lousy trolls. I've told them and I've told them to leave them broomsticks be. But no, they will not listen. They always make the joke. They put enchantment on them."

"Mr. O'Toole," Maxwell shouted. "You remember me?"

The goblin swung around and squinted at him with red-filmed, near-sighted eyes.

"The professor!" he screamed. "The good friend of all of us. Oh, what an awful shame! I tell you, professor, the hides of them trolls I shall nail upon the door and pin their ears on trees."

"Enchantment?" Churchill asked. "Do you say enchantment?"

"What other would it be?" Mr. O'Toole fumed. "What else would bring a broomstick down out of the sky?"

He ambled closer to Maxwell and peered anxiously at him. "Can it be really you?" he asked, with some solicitude. "In the honest flesh? We had word that you had died. We sent the wreath of mistletoe and holly to express our deepest grief."

"It is I, most truly," said Maxwell, slipping easily into the idiom of the Little Folk. "You heard rumor only."

"Then for sheer joy," cried Mr. O'Toole, "we three shall down great tankards of October ale. The new batch is ready for the running off, and I invite you gentlemen most cordially to share the first of it with me."

Other goblins, a half dozen of them, were running down the path, and Mr. O'Toole waved lustily to hurry them along.

"Always late," he lamented. "Never on the ball. Always show-

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ing up, but always somewhat slightly late. Good boys, all of them, with hearts correctly placed, but lacking the alertness that is the hallmark of true goblins such as I."

The goblins came loping and panting down onto the green, ranged themselves expectantly in front of Mr. O'Toole.

"I have jobs for you," he told them. "First you go down to the bridge and you tell them trolls no more enchantments they shall make. They are to cease and desist entirely. Tell them this is their one last chance. If they do such things again that bridge we shall tear apart, stone by mossy stone, and those stones we shall scatter far and wide, so there never is a chance of upbuilding that bridge yet again. And they are to uplift the enchantment from this fallen broomstick so it flies as good as new.

"And some others of you I want to seek the fairies out and explain to them the defacement of their green, being sure to lay all blame for such upon them dirty trolls and promising the turf shall be all fixed smooth and lovely for their next dancing when the moon is full."

"And yet another of you must take care of Dobbins, making sure his clumsy self does no more damage to the green, but letting him crop, perchance, a mouthful

or two of the longer grass if it can be found. The poor beast does not often get the chance to regale himself with pasturage such as this."

He turned back to Maxwell and Churchill, dusting his hands together in symbolism of a job well done.

"And now, gentlemen," he said, "you please to climb the hill with me, and we will essay what can be done with sweet October ale. I beg you, however, to go slowly in very pity of me, since this paunch of mine seems grown large of late, and I suffer most exceedingly from the shortness of the breath."

"Lead on, old friend," said Maxwell. "We shall match our steps with yours most willingly. It has been too long since we have quaffed October ale together."

"Yes, by all means," said Churchill, somewhat weakly.

They started up the path. Before them, looming on the ridge, the ruined castle stood gaunt against the paleness of the sky.

"I must beforehand apologize," said Mr. O'Toole, "for the condition of the castle. It is a very drafty place, conducive to colds and sinus infections and other varied miseries. The winds blow through it wickedly, and it smells

of damp and mold. I do not understand in fullness why you humans, once you build the castles for us, do not make them weathertight and comfortable. Because we, beforesometimes, dwelt in ruins does not necessarily mean that we have forsook all comfort and convenience. We dwelt in them, forsooth, because they were the best poor Europe had to offer."

He paused to gulp for breath, then went on again. "I can well recall, two thousand years ago or more, we dwelt in brand-new castles, poor enough, of course, for the rude humans of that time could not build the better, being all thumbs and without proper tools and no machinery at all and being, in general, a slab-sided race of people. And us forced to hide in the nooks and crannies of the castles since the benighted humans of that day feared and detested us in all their ignorance and sought to erect great spells against us.

"Although," he said, with some satisfaction, "mere humans were not proficient with the spells. We, with no raising of the sweat, could afford them spades and clubs and beat their spells, hands down."

"Two thousand years?" asked Churchill. "You don't mean to say"

Maxwell made a quick motion

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of his head in an attempt to silence him.

Mr. O'Toole stopped in the middle of the path and threw Churchill a withering glance.

"I can recall," he said, "when the barbarians first came, most rudely, from that fenny forest you now call Central Europe to knock with the hilts of their crude iron swords upon the very gates of Rome. We heard of it in the forest depths where we made our homes; and there were others then, but dead long since, who had heard the news, some weeks after its transpirence, from Thermopylae."

"I am sorry," Maxwell said. "Not every one is as well acquainted with the Little Folk"

"Please," said Mr. O'Toole, "you acquaint him, then."

"It's the truth," Maxwell said to Churchill, "or, at least, it could be. Not immortal, for they eventually do die. But long-lived beyond anything we know. Births are few — very few, indeed, for if they weren't there'd not be room for them on Earth. But they live to an extremely ripe old age.

"It is," said Mr. O'Toole, "because we burrow deep to the heart of nature and do not waste precious vitality of spirit upon those petty concerns which make

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wreckage of the lives and hopes of humans."

"But these," he said, "are dolorous topics on which to waste so glorious an autumn afternoon. So let us fasten our thoughts, rather, with great steadfastness, upon the foaming ale that awaits us on the hilltop."

He lapsed into silence and started up the path again at a more rapid pace than he had set before.

Scuttling down the path toward them came a tiny goblin, his multicolored, too-large shirt whipping in the wind of his headlong running.

"The ale!" he screamed. "The ale!"

He skidded to a halt in front of the three toiling up the path.

"What of the ale?" panted Mr. O'Toole. "Do you mean to confess to me that you have been the sampling of it?"

"It has gone sour," wailed the little goblin. "The whole bewitched mess of it is sour."

"But ale can't go sour," protested Maxwell, grasping some sense of the tragedy that had taken place.

Mr. O'Toole bounced upon the path in devastating anger. His face turned from brown to red to purple. His breath came gushing out in wheezing gasps.

"It can, bedamned," he shouted, "with a spell of wizardry!"

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He turned around and started rapidly down the path, trailed by the little goblin.

"Leave me at them filthy trolls!" shouted Mr. O'Toole. "Leave me wrap my paws around their guzzles. I will dig them out with these two hands and hang them in the sun to dry. I will skin them all entire. I will teach them lessons they never will unlearn!"

His bellowing dwindled with distance to unintelligible rumbling as he scrambled swiftly down the path, heading for the bridge beneath which the trolls hung out.

The two humans stood watching, filled with admiration and wonder at such ponderous, towering wrath.

"Well," said Churchill, "there goes our chance at sweet October ale."

IV

The clock in Music Hall began striking the hour of six as Maxwell reached the outskirts of the campus, riding from the airport on one of the slower, outer belts of the roadway. Churchill had taken another roadway, and Maxwell had been glad of that. Not only that he felt a faint distaste for the man, but from the wish to be alone. He wanted to ride slowly, with the windshield

down, in silence, without the need of conversation, to soak up the sight and feel of those few square miles of buildings and of malls — coming home again to the one place that he loved.

Dusk sifted through the campus like a mist of benediction, softening the outlines of the buildings, turning the malls into areas that could have been romantic etchings out of story books.

Knots of students stood about the malls, talking quietly, carrying their satchels or with books tucked beneath their arms. A white-haired man sat on a bench, watching a pair of squirrels playing on the lawn. Two reptilian aliens hunched along one of the misty walks, moving slowly and engrossed in talk. A human student strode smartly along the sidewalk, whistling as he went, the whistle waking echoes in the quiet angles of the buildings. Meeting and passing the reptiles, he lifted an arm in grave salute. And everywhere were the trees, great and ancient elms that had stood since time forgotten, the sturdy sentinels of many generations.

Then the great clock started the ringing of the hour, the bronze clangor of it beating far across the land, and it seemed to Maxwell that in the clock the campus was bidding him hello. The clock

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was a friend, he thought — not to him alone, but to all within the hearing of it, the voice of the campus. Lying in bed, before he went to sleep, he had listened, night after night, to its chiming, its ringing out of time. And more, perhaps, than the ringing out of time. Rather a watchman in the night crying all was well.

Ahead of him the mighty complex of Time College loomed out of the dusk — looming up to dwarf the roadway and the mall, great blocks of plastic and glass, with lights burning in many of its windows. Squatted at the base of the complex, crouched the museum and across its front Maxwell saw the wind-fluttered whiteness of a sign painted on white fabric. In the dusk and distance he could make out only one word: SHAKESPEARE.

He grinned to himself, thinking of it. English Lit would be beside itself. Old Chenery and all the rest of them had never quite forgiven Time for establishing, two or three years ago, that the Earl of Oxford, not Shakespeare, had been the author of the plays. And this personal appearance of the man from Stratford-on-Avon would be rubbing salt into wounds that were far from healed.

Far ahead, sitting on its hill at the west end of the campus, Maxwell could make out the great GOBLIN RESERVATION

dark hulk of the administration section, etched darkly against the last faint brushing of red in the western sky.

The belt moved on, past Time College and its squatting museum with the sign fluttering in the wind. The clock ended its telling of the time, the last notes of the chimes fading far into the distance.

Six o'clock. In another few minutes he would be getting off the belt and heading for the Winston Arms, which had been his home for the last four — no, the last five years. He put his hand into the right-hand pocket of his jacket, and his fingers traced the hard outlines of the small ring of keys tucked into the small key pocket inside the jacket pocket.

Now, for the first time since he'd left Wisconsin Station, the story of that other Peter Maxwell forged to the forefront of his thoughts. It could be true, of course — although it didn't seem too likely. It would be very much the kind of trick Security might play to crack a man wide open. But if it were not true, why had there been no report from Coonskin of his failure to arrive? Although, he realized, that piece of information also had come from Inspector Drayton, as well as the further information that the same thing had happened twice before. If Drayton could be suspect on



one story, he also was suspect on the other two. If there had been other beings picked up by the crystal planet, he had certainly not been told of them when he had been there. But that also, Maxwell reminded himself, was no trustworthy evidence. Undoubtedly the creatures on the crystal planet had told him only those things they wanted him to know.

The thing that bothered him the most, come to think of it,

was not what Drayton had said, but what Mr. O'Toole had told him: *We sent the wreath of mistletoe and holly to express our deepest grief.* If events had turned out differently, he would have talked with his goblin friend about it, but the way things went, there had been no chance to talk of anything at all.

It all could wait, he told himself. In just a little while, once he had gotten home, he'd pick up a phone and make a call — to any one of many people — and then he'd know the truth. Who should he call? he wondered. There was Harlow Sharp, at Time, or Dallas Gregg, chairman of his own department, or maybe Xigmu Maon Tyre, the old Eridanean with the snow-white fur and the brooding violet eyes who had spent a long lifetime in his tiny cubbyhole of an office working out an analysis of the structuring of myths. Or maybe Allen Preston, friend and attorney. Preston, probably, he told himself, for if what Drayton had told him should happen to be true, there might be some nasty legal questions stemming out of it.

Impatiently, he snarled at himself. He was believing it, he was beginning to believe it; if he kept on like this, he could argue himself into thinking that it might be true.

The Winston Arms was just down the street. He got up from his seat, picked up his bag and stepped to the barely moving outer belt. He got off in front of the Winston Arms.

No one was in sight as he climbed the broad stone stairs and went into the foyer. Fumbling in his pocket, he took out the key ring and found the key that unlocked the outer door. An elevator stood waiting, and he got into it and pressed the button for the seventh floor.

The key slid smoothly into the lock of his apartment and when he twisted it the door came open. He stepped into the darkened room. Behind him the door swung shut automatically, with a snick-ing of the lock, and he reached out his hand toward the panel to snap on the light.

But with his hand poised to press, he stopped. For there was something wrong. A feeling, a sense of something, a certain smell, perhaps. That was it — a smell. The faint, delicate odor of a strange perfume.

He smashed his hand against the panel, and the lights came up.

The room was not the same. The furniture was different. And the screaming paintings on the wall — he had never had, he *would* never have paintings such as that!

Behind him the lock snicked

again, and he spun around. The door swung open and a saber-tooth tiger stalked in.

At the sight of Maxwell, the big cat dropped into a crouch and snarled, exposing six-inch stabbing fangs.

Gingerly, Maxwell backed away. The cat crept closer by a foot, still snarling. Maxwell took another backward step, felt the sudden blow above the ankle, tried to twist away, but was unable to, and knew that he was falling. He had seen the hassock, he should have remembered it was there — but he hadn't. He'd backed into it and tripped himself and now he was going over flat upon his back. He tried to force his body to relax against striking on the floor — but he didn't hit the floor. His back smashed down into a yielding softness, and he knew he'd landed on the couch that stood behind the hassock.

The cat was sailing through the air in a graceful leap, its ears laid back, its mouth half open, its massive paws outstretched to form a battering ram. Maxwell raised his arms in a swift defensive gesture, but they were brushed aside as if they'd not been there, and the paws smashed down into his chest, pinning him against the couch. The great cat's head, with its gleaming fangs, hung just above his face. Slowly,

almost gently, the cat lowered its head, and a long pink tongue came out and slathered, raspingly, across Maxwell's face.

The cat began to purr.

“Sylvester!” cried a voice from the doorway. “Sylvester, cut that out!”

The cat raked Maxwell's face once again with its moist and rasping tongue, then sat back upon its haunches, with a half-grin on its face and its ears tipped forward, regarding Maxwell with a friendly and enthusiastic interest.

Maxwell struggled to a half-sitting posture, with the small of his back resting on the seat cushions and his shoulders propped against the couch's back.

“And who might you be?” asked the girl standing in the doorway.

“Why, I”

“You've got your nerve,” she said.

Sylvester purred loudly.

“I'm sorry, miss,” said Maxwell. “But I live here. Or at least, I did. Isn't this 721?”

“It is, indeed,” she said. “I rented it just a week ago.”

Maxwell shook his head. “I should have known,” he said. “The furniture was wrong.”

“I had the landlord throw out the old stuff,” she said. “It simply was atrocious.”

“Let me guess,” said Maxwell. “An old green lounge, somewhat the worse for wear”

“And a walnut liquor cabinet,” said the girl, “and a monstrous seascape and”

Maxwell lifted his head wearily. “That's enough,” he said. “That was my stuff that you had thrown out.”

“I don't understand,” said the girl. “The landlord said the former occupant was dead. An accident, I think.”

Maxwell got slowly to his feet. The big cat stood up, moved closer, rubbed affectionately against his legs.

“Stop that, Sylvester,” said the girl.

Sylvester went on rubbing.

“You mustn't mind him,” she said. “He's just a great big baby.”

“A bio-mech?”

She nodded. “The cutest thing alive. He goes everywhere with me. He seldom is a bother. I don't know what's got into him. It seems that he must like you.”

She had been looking at the cat, but now she glanced up sharply.

“Is there something wrong with you?” she asked.

Maxwell shook his head.

“You're sort of frosty around the gills.”

“A bit of shock,” he told her. “I suppose that's it. What I told you was the truth. I did, at one

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time, live here. Up until a few weeks ago. There was a mix-up somehow”

“Sit down,” she said. “Could you use a drink?”

“I suspect I could,” he said. “My name is Peter Maxwell, and I’m a member of the faculty”

“Wait a moment. You said Maxwell? Peter Maxwell. I remember now. That’s the name.”

“Yes, I know,” said Maxwell. “Of the man who died.”

He sat down carefully on the couch.

“I’ll get the drink,” the girl said.

Sylvester slid closer and gently laid his massive head in Maxwell’s lap. Maxwell scratched him behind an ear; and, purring loudly, Sylvester turned his head a bit to show Maxwell where it itched.

The girl came with the drink and sat down beside him.

“I still don’t understand,” she told him. “If you’re the man who —”

“The whole thing,” Maxwell told her, “becomes somewhat complicated.”

“I must say you’re taking it rather well. Shaken up a bit, perhaps. But not stricken in a heap.”

“Well, the fact of the matter is,” said Maxwell, “that I half-way knew it. I’d been told, you see, but I didn’t quite believe it.

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I suppose the truth is that I wouldn’t let myself believe it.”

He raised the glass. “You’re not drinking?”

“If you’re all right,” she said. “If you feel okay, I’ll get one for myself.”

“Oh, I’m all right,” said Maxwell. “I’ll manage to survive.”

He looked at her and for the first time really saw her — sleek and trim, with bobbed black hair, long eyelashes, high cheekbones and eyes that smiled at him.

“What’s your name?” he asked.

“I am Carol Hampton. A historian at Time.”

He said, “Miss Hampton, I apologize for the situation. I have been away — off planet. Just returned. And I had a key, and it fit the door and when I’d left it had been my place.”

“No need to explain,” she said.

“We’ll have the drink,” he said.

“Then I’ll get up and go. Unless —”

“Unless what?”

“Unless you’d be willing to have dinner with me. Let’s call it a way for me to repay your understanding. You could have run out shrieking.”

“If this was all a pitch!” she said. “If you —”

“It couldn’t be,” he said. “I’d be too stupid to get it figured out. And, besides, how come I had the key?”

She looked at him for a mo-

ment, then said, "It was silly of me. But Sylvester will have to go with us. He won't be left alone."

"Why," said Maxwell, "I wouldn't think of leaving him. He and I are pals."

"It'll cost you a steak," she warned. "He is always hungry and he eats nothing but good steaks. Big ones. Raw."

V

The Pig & Whistle was dark and clamorous and smoky. The tables were jammed together, with narrow lanes between them. Candles burned with flickering flames. The murmurous din of many voices, seemingly talking all at once, filled the low-ceilinged room.

Maxwell stopped and peered, trying to locate a table that might be vacant. There wasn't any. But he wanted to eat here. The place was a hangout of students and some members of the faculty; it spelled the campus to him.

He said to Carol Hampton, "Perhaps we should go somewhere else."

"There'll be someone along in just a minute," she said, "to show us to a table. Everyone seems so busy. There must have been a rush — Sylvester! Cut that out!"

She spoke appealingly to the people at the table beside which

they stood. "You'll excuse him, please. He has no manners, none at all. Especially table manners. He snatches everything in sight."

Sylvester licked his chops, looking satisfied.

"Think nothing of it, miss," said the man with the bushy beard. "I really didn't want it. To order steak is just compulsive with me."

Someone shouted across the room. "Pete! Pete Maxwell!"

Maxwell peered into the gloom. At a far table, inserted in a corner, someone had risen and was waving his arms. Maxwell finally made him out. It was Alley Oop, and beside him sat the white-shrouded figure of Ghost.

"Friends of yours?" asked Carol.

"Yes. Apparently they want us to join them. Do you mind?"

"The Neanderthaler?" she asked.

"You know him?"

"No. I just see him around at times. But I'd like to meet him. And that is the Ghost?"

"The two are inseparable," said Maxwell.

"Well, let's go over, then."

"We can say hello and go somewhere else."

"Not on your life," she said.

"This place looks interesting."

"You've never been here before?"

"I've never dared," she said.

"I'll break the path," he told her.

He forged slowly among the tables, trailed by the girl and cat.

Alley Oop lunged out into the aisle to meet him, flung his arms around him, hugged him, then grasped him by the shoulders and thrust him out at arms-length to stare into his face.

"You are Old Pete?" he asked. "You aren't fooling us?"

"I am Pete," said Maxwell. "Who do you think I am?"

"Well, what I want to know then," said Oop, "is who in hell it was we buried three weeks ago last Thursday. Both me and Ghost were there. And you owe us twenty bucks refund on the flowers we sent. That is what they cost us."

"Let us sit down," said Maxwell.

"Afraid of creating a scene," said Oop. "Hell, this place is made for scenes. There are fist fights every hour, and there's always someone jumping up on a table and making a speech."

"Oop," said Maxwell, "there is a lady present, and I want you to tame down and get civilized. Miss Carol Hampton, this great oaf is Alley Oop."

"I am delighted to meet you, Miss Hampton," said Alley Oop. "And what it that you have there

with you? As I live and breathe, a saber-tooth! I'll have to tell you about the time, during a blizzard, I sought shelter in a cave and this big cat was there and me with nothing but a dull stone knife. I had lost my club, you see, when I met the bear, and —"

"Some other time," said Maxwell. "At least, let us sit down. We are hungry. We don't want to get thrown out."

"Pete," said Alley Oop, "it is a matter of some large distinction to be heaved out of this joint. You ain't arrived socially otherwise."

But, muttering under his breath, he led the way back to the table and held a chair for Carol. Sylvester planted himself between Maxwell and Carol, propped his chin on the table and glared balefully at Oop.

"That cat don't like me," Oop declared. "Probably he knows how many of his ancestors I wiped out back in the Old Stone Age."

"He's only a bio-mech," said Carol. "He couldn't possibly."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Oop. "That critter is no bio-mech. He's got the dirty meanness in his eyes all saber-toothers have."

"Please, Oop," said Maxwell. "Just a moment, please. Miss Hampton, this gentleman is Ghost. A long-time friend."

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Ghost," said Carol.

"Not mister," said Ghost. "Just plain Ghost. That is all I am. And the terrible thing about it is that I don't know who I am the ghost of. I'm most pleased to meet you. It is so comfortable with four around the table. There is something nice and balanced in the number four."

"Well, now," said Oop, "that we know one another, leave us proceed to business. Let us do some drinking. It's lonesome for a man to drink all by himself. I love Ghost, of course, for his many sterling qualities, but I hate a man who doesn't drink."

"**Y**ou know I can't drink," said Ghost. "Nor eat, either. Or smoke. There's not much a ghost can do. But I wish you wouldn't keep pointing it out to everyone we meet."

Oop said to Carol, "You seem to be surprised that a barbaric Neanderthaler can sling the language around with the facility I command."

"Not surprised," said Carol. "Astounded."

"Oop," Maxwell told her, "has soaked up more education in the last twelve years than most ordinary men. Started out virtually in kindergarten and now is working on his doctorate. And the thing about it is that he intends

to keep right on. You might say he is one of our most notable professional students."

Oop raised his arm and waved it, bellowing at a waiter. "Over here," he shouted. "There are people here who wish to patronize you. All dying of slow thirst."

"The thing," said Ghost, "I have always admired about him is his shy, retiring nature."

"I keep on studying," said Oop, "not so much that I hunger after knowledge as for the enjoyment I get from the incredulous astonishment on the faces of those stuffed-shirt professors and those goofy students. Not," he said to Maxwell, "that I maintain all professors are stuffed shirts."

"Thank you," Maxwell said.

"There are those who seem to think," said Oop, "that *Homo sapien neanderthalensis* can be nothing other than a stupid brute. After all, he became extinct, he couldn't hold his own — which in itself is prime evidence that he was very second rate. I'm afraid that I'll continue to devote my life to proving —"

The waiter appeared at Oop's elbow. "It's you again," he said. "I might have known when you yelled at me. You have no breeding. Oop."

"We have a man here," Oop told him, ignoring the insult, "who has come back from the dead. I think it would be fitting that

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we should celebrate his resurrection with a flourish of good fellowship."

"You want something to drink, I take it."

"Why," said Oop, "don't you simply bring a bottle of good booze, a bucket of ice and four — no, three glasses. Ghost doesn't drink, you know."

"I know," the waiter said.

"That is," said Oop, "unless Miss Hampton wants one of these fancy drinks"

"Who am I to gum up the works?" asked Carol. "What is it you are drinking?"

"Bourbon," said Oop. "Pete and I have a lousy taste in liquor."

"Bourbon let it be," said Carol.

"I take it," said the waiter, "that when I lug the bottle over here, you'll have the cash to pay for it. I remember the time —"

"Whatever I may lack," said Oop, "will be forthcoming from Old Pete."

"Pete?" The waiter glanced at Maxwell. "Professor?" he exclaimed. "I had heard that you —"

"That's what I been trying to tell you," said Oop. "That's what we're celebrating. He came back from the dead."

"But I don't understand."

"You don't need to," said Oop. "Just rustle up the booze."

The waiter scurried off.

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"And now," said Ghost to Maxwell, "please tell us what you are. You are no ghost, apparently. Or if you are, there's been a vast improvement in procedure since the man I represent shuffled off his mortal coil."

VI

"It seems," Maxwell told them, "that I'm a split personality. One of me, I understand, got in an accident and died."

"But that's impossible," said Carol. "Split personality in the mental sense — sure, that can be understood. But physically —"

"There's nothing in heaven or Earth," said Ghost, "that is impossible."

"That's a bad quotation," said Oop, "and, besides, you misquoted it."

He put a hand to his hairy chest and scratched vigorously with blunt fingers.

"You needn't look so horrified," he said to Carol. "I itch. I'm a brute creature of nature, therefore I scratch. And I'm not naked, either. I have a pair of shorts on."

"He's house-broken," said Maxwell, "but just barely."

"To get back to this split personality," said the girl, "can you tell us what actually did happen?"

"I set out for one of the Coon-

skin planets," said Maxwell, "and along the way somehow my wave pattern duplicated itself, and I wound up in two places."

"You mean there were two Pete Maxwells?"

"That's the way of it."

"If I were you," said Oop, "I'd sue them. These Transportation people get away with murder. You could shake them down for plenty. Me and Ghost could testify for you. We went to your funeral."

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I think Ghost and I should sue as well. For mental anguish. Our best friend cold and rigid in his casket and us prostrate with grief."

"We really were, you know," said Ghost.

"I have no doubt of it," said Maxwell.

"I must say," said Coral, "that all three of you take it rather lightly."

"What do you want of us?" demanded Oop. "Sing hallelujahs, perhaps? Or bug out our eyes and be filled with the wonder of it? We lost a pal, and now he's back again."

"But one of him is dead!"

"Well," said Oop, "so far as we were concerned, there was never more than one of him. And maybe this is better. Imagine the embarrassing situations that could develop if there were two of him."

Carol turned to Maxwell. "And you?" she asked.

He shook his head. "In a day or two, I'll take some serious thought of it. Right now, I guess, I'm putting off thinking about it. To tell you the truth, when I do think about it, I get a little numb. But tonight I've got a pretty girl and two old friends and a great big pussy cat and a bottle of liquor to get rid of and later on some food."

He grinned at her. She shrugged.

"I never saw such a crazy bunch," she said. "I believe I like it."

"I like it, too," said Oop. "Say whatever you will of it, this civilization of yours is a vast improvement over the days of yore. It was the luckiest day of my life when a Time team snatched me hence just at the point when some of my loving brother tribesmen were about to make a meal of me. Not that I blame them particularly, you understand. It had been a long, hard winter and the snow was deep and the game had been very scarce. And there were certain members of the tribe who felt they had a score or two to settle with me. And I'll not kid you; they may have had a score. I was about to be knocked upon the head and, so to speak, dumped into the pot."

"Cannibalism!" Carol said, horrified.

"Why, naturally," he told her. "In those rough and ready days, it was quite acceptable. But, of course, you wouldn't understand. You've never been really hungry, I take it. Gut hungry. So shriveled up with hunger —"

He halted his talk and looked around.

"The thing that is most comforting about this culture," he declared, "is the abundance of the food. Back in the old days we had our ups and downs. We'd bag a mastodon and we'd eat until we vomited and then we'd eat some more."

Ghost said, warningly, "I doubt that this is a proper subject for dinner conversation."

Oop glanced at Carol.

"You must say this much for me," he insisted. "I'm honest. When I mean vomit, I say vomit and not regurgitate."

The waiter brought the liquor, thumping the bottle and the ice bucket down upon the table.

"You want to order now?" he asked.

"We ain't decided yet," said Oop, "if we're going to eat in this crummy joint. It's all right to get liquored up in, but —"

"Then, sir," the waiter said, and laid down the check.

Oop dug into his pockets and came up with cash. Maxwell pull-

ed the bucket and the bottle close and began fixing drinks.

"We're going to eat here, aren't we?" asked Carol. "If Sylvester doesn't get that steak you promised him, I don't know what will happen. He's been so patient and so good, with the smell of all the food . . ."

"He's already had one steak," Maxwell pointed out. "How much can he eat?"

"An unlimited amount," said Oop. "In the old days one of them monsters would polish off an elk in a single sitting. Did I ever tell you —"

"Yes," said Ghost.

"But that was a cooked steak," protested Carol, "and he likes them raw. Besides, it was a small one."

"Oop," said Maxwell, "get that waiter back here. You are good at it. You have the voice for it."

Oop signaled with a brawny arm and bellowed. He waited for a moment, then bellowed once again, without results.

"He won't pay attention to me," Oop growled. "Maybe it's not our waiter. I never am able to tell them monkeys apart. They all look alike to me."

"I don't like the crowd tonight," said Ghost. "I have been watching it. There's trouble in the air."

"What is wrong with it?" asked Maxwell.

"There are an awful lot of creeps from English Lit. This is not their hangout. Mostly the crowd here are Time and Supernatural.

"You mean this Shakespeare business?"

"That might be it," said Ghost.

Maxwell handed Carol her drink, pushed another across the table to Oop.

"It seems a shame," Carol said to Ghost, "not to give you one. Couldn't you even sniff it, just a little."

"Don't let it bother you," said Oop. "The guy gets drunk on moonbeams. He can dance on rainbows. He has a lot of advantages you and I don't have. For one thing, he's immortal. What could kill a ghost?"

"I'm not sure of that," said Ghost.

"There's one thing that bothers me," said Carol. "You don't mind, do you?"

"Not at all," said Ghost.

"It's this business of you not knowing who you are the ghost of. Is that true or is it just a joke?"

"It is true," said Ghost. "And I don't mind telling you, it's embarrassing and confusing. But I've just plain forgotten. From England — that much, at least, I know. But the name I can't

recall. I would suspect most other ghosts would know that much."

"We have no other ghosts," said Maxwell. "Contacts with other ghosts, of course, and conversations and interviews with them. But no other ghost has ever come to live with us. Why did you do it, Ghost — come to live with us?"

"He's a natural chiseler," said Oop. "Always figuring out the angles."

"You're wrong there," Maxwell said. "It's damned little we can do for Ghost."

Said Ghost, "You give me a sense of reality."

"Well, no matter what the reason," said Maxwell, "I am glad you did it."

"The three of you," said Carol, "have been friends for a long, long time."

"And it seems strange to you?" asked Oop.

"Well, yes, maybe it does," she said.

Sounds of scuffling came from the front of the place. Carol and Maxwell turned around in their chairs to look toward it, but there wasn't much that one could see.

A man suddenly loomed on top of the table and began to sing:

"Hurrah for Old Bill Shakespeare,

"He never wrote them plays.

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"He stayed at home and, chasing girls,

Sang dirty rondelays!"

Jeers and catcalls broke out from over the room, and someone threw something that went sailing past the singer. Part of the crowd took up the song:

"Hurrah for Old Bill Shakespeare;

He never wrote them . . ."

Someone with a bull voice howled: "To hell with Old Bill Shakespeare!"

The room exploded into action. Chairs went over. There were other people on top of tables. Shouts reverberated, and there was shoving and pushing. Fists began to fly. Various items went sailing through the air.

Maxwell sprang to his feet, reached out an arm and swept it back, shoving Carol behind him. Oop came charging across the table top with a wild warwhoop. His foot caught the bucket and sent the ice cubes flying.

"I'll mow 'em down," he yelled at Maxwell. "You pile 'em to one side!"

Maxwell saw a fist coming at him out of nowhere and ducked to one side, bringing his own fist up in a vicious jab, hitting out at nothing, but aiming in the direction from which the fist had come. Over his shoulder came Oop's brawny arm, with a massive fist attached. It smacked in-

to a face with a splattering sound, and out beyond the table a figure went slumping to the floor.

Something heavy and traveling fast caught Maxwell behind the ear, and he went down. Feet surged all around him. Someone stepped on his hand. Someone fell on top of him. Above him, seemingly from a long ways off, he heard Oop's wild whooping.

Twisting around, he shoved off the body that had fallen across him and staggered to his feet.

A hand grabbed him by the elbow and twisted him around.

"Let's get out of here," said Oop. "Someone will get hurt."

Carol was backed against the table, bent over, with her hands clutching the scruff of Sylvester's neck. Sylvester was standing on his hind legs and pawing the air with his forelegs. Snarls were rumbling in his throat, and his long fangs gleamed.

"If we don't get him out of here," said Oop, "that cat will get his steak."

He swooped down and wrapped an arm around the cat, lifting him by the middle, hugging him tight against his chest.

"Take care of the girl," Oop told Maxwell. "There's a back door around here somewhere. And don't leave that bottle behind. We'll need it later on."

Maxwell reached out and grabbed the bottle.

There was no sign of Ghost.

VII

"I'm a coward," Ghost confessed. "I admit that I turn chicken at the sight of violence."

"And you," said Oop, "the one guy in the world no one can lay a mitt on."

They sat at the rude, square, rickety table that Oop once, in a moment of housekeeping energy, had knocked together from rough boards. Carol pushed away her plate. "I was starved," she said, "but not any more."

"You're not the only one," said Oop. "Look at our putty cat."

Sylvester was curled up in front of the fireplace, his bobbed tail clamped down tight against his rump, his furry paws covering his nose. His whiskers stirred gently as his breath went in and out.

"That's the first time in my life," said Oop, "I ever saw a saber-toother have more than he could eat."

He reached out for the bottle and shook it. It had an empty sound. He lumbered to his feet and went across the floor, knelt and raised a small door set into the floor, reaching down with his arm and searching in the space underneath the door. He brought up a glass fruit jar and set it to one side. He brought

up a second fruit jar and set it beside the first. Finally he came up triumphantly with a bottle.

He put the fruit jars back and closed the door. Back at the table, he snapped the sealer off the bottle and reached out to pour drinks.

"You guys don't want ice," he said. "It just dilutes the booze. Besides, I haven't any."

He jerked a thumb back toward the door hidden in the floor. "My cache," he said. "I keep a jug or two hid out. Some day I might break a leg or something and the doc would say I couldn't drink."

"Not because of a broken leg," said Ghost.

"Well, then, something else," said Oop.

They sat contentedly with their drinks, Ghost staring at the fire. Outside a rising wind worried at the shack.

"I've never had a better meal," said Carol. "First time I ever cooked my own steak stuck on a stick above an open fire."

Oop belched contentedly. "That's the way we did it back in the Old Stone Age. That, or eat it raw, like the saber-toother. We didn't have no stoves or ovens or fancy things like that."

"I have the feeling," said Maxwell, "that it would be better not to ask, but where did you get that rack of ribs? I imagine all

the butcher shops were closed."

"Well, they were," admitted Oop, "but there was this one with a back door that had this itty bitty padlock"

"Some day," said Ghost, "you'll get into trouble."

Oop shook his head. "I don't think so. Not this time. Primal necessity — no, I guess that's not the phrase. When a man is hungry he has a right to food anywhere he finds it. That was the law back in prehistoric days. I imagine you still might make a case of it in a court of law. Besides, tomorrow I'll go back and explain what happened. By the way," he said to Maxwell, "have you any money?"

"I'm loaded," Maxwell told him. "I carried expense money for the Coonskin trip and I never spent a cent of it."

"On this other planet you were a guest," said Carol.

"I suppose I was," said Maxwell. "I never did figure out our exact relationship."

"They were nice people?"

"Well. Yes, nice — but people, I don't know."

He turned to Oop. "How much will you need?"

"I figure a hundred ought to settle it. There is the meat and the busted door, not to mention the bruised feelings of our friend, the butcher."

Maxwell took his billfold from his pocket and, counting out some bills, handed them to Oop.

"Thanks," said Oop. "Some day I'll pay you back."

"No," said Maxwell. "The party is on me. I started out to take Carol to dinner, and things got somewhat upset."

On the hearth, Sylvester stretched and yawned, then went back to sleep, lying on his back now, with his legs sticking in the air.

Ghost asked, "You're on a visit here, Miss Hampton?"

"No," said Carol, surprised. "I work here. What gave you that idea?"

"The tiger," said Ghost. "A bio-mech, you said. I thought, naturally, you were with Bio-mech."

"I see," said Carol. "Vienna or New York."

"There is a center also," said Ghost, "somewhere in Asia. Ulan Bator, if my memory is correct."

"You've been there?"

"No," said Ghost. "I only heard of it."

"But he could," said Oop. "He can go anywhere. In the blinking of an eyelash. That's why the folks at Supernatural continue to put up with him. They hope that some day they can come up with whatever he has got. But Old Ghost is cagey. He's not telling them."

"The real reason for his silence," said Maxwell, "is that he's on Transport payroll. It's worth their while to keep him quiet. If he revealed his traveling techniques, Transport would go broke. No more need of them. People just up and go anywhere they wished, on their own — a mile or a million light-years."

"And he's the soul of tact," said Oop. "What he was getting at back there was that unless you are in Bio-mech and can cook

up something for yourself, it costs money to have something like that saber-toothed."

"Oh, I see," said Carol. "I guess there's truth in that. They do cost a lot of money. But I haven't got that kind of money. My father, before he retired, was in Bio-mech. New York. Sylvester was a joint project of a seminar he headed. The students gave him to my Dad."

"I still don't believe," said Oop, "that cat's a bio-mech. He's got that dirty glitter in his eyes when he looks at me."

"As a matter of fact," Carol told him, "there is a lot more bio than mech in all of them today. The name originated when what amounted to a highly sophisticated electronic brain and nervous system was housed in specific protoplasms. But today about the only mechanical things about them are those organs that are likely to wear out if they were made of tissue. The heart, the kidneys, the lungs, things like that. What is being done at Bio-mech today is the actual creations of specific life forms — but you all know that, of course."

"There are some strange stories," Maxwell said. "A group of supermen, kept under lock and key. You have heard of that?"

"Yes, heard of it," she said. "There are always rumors."

"The best one that I've heard



in recent days," said Oop, "really is a lulu. Someone told me Supernatural has made contact with the Devil. How about that, Pete?"

"I wouldn't know," said Maxwell. "I suppose someone has tried. I'm almost sure someone must have tried. It's such an obvious thing for one to have a go at."

"You mean," asked Carol, "that there might really be a Devil?"

"Two centuries ago," said Maxwell, "people asked, in exactly the same tone of voice you are now, if there actually were such things as trolls and goblins."

"And ghosts," said Ghost.

"You're serious!" Carol cried.

"Not serious," said Maxwell. "Just not ready to foreclose even on the Devil."

"This is a marvelous age," declared Oop, "as I am sure you've heard me indicate before. You've done away with superstition and old wives' tales. You search in them for truth. But my people knew there were trolls and goblins and all the rest of them. The stories of them, you understand, were always based on fact. Except that later on, when he outgrew his savage simplicity, if you can call it that, man denied the fact; could not allow himself to believe these things that he knew were true. So he varnished them

over and hid them safe away in the legend and the myth and when the human population kept on increasing, these creatures went into deep hiding. As well they might have, for there was a time when they were not the engaging creatures you seem to think they are today."

Ghost asked: "And the Devil?"

"I'm not sure," said Oop. "Maybe. But I can't be sure. There were all these things you have lured out and rediscovered and sent to live on their reservations. But there were many more. Some fearful, all a nuisance."

"You don't seem to have liked them very well," Carol observed.

"Miss," said Oop, "I didn't. I hated the little bastards' guts."

"It would seem to me," said Ghost, "that this would be a fertile field for some Time investigation. Apparently there were many different kinds of these — would you call them primates?"

"I think you might," said Maxwell.

"Primates of a different stripe than the apes and man."

"Of a very different stripe," said Oop. "Vicious little stinkers."

"Some day, I'm sure," said Carol, "Time will get around to it. They know it, of course?"

"They should," said Oop. "I've told them often enough, with appropriate description."

"Time has too much to do," Maxwell reminded them. "Too many areas of interest. And the entire past to cover."

"And no money to do it with," said Carol.

"There," declared Maxwell, "speaks a loyal Time staff member."

"But it's true," she cried. "The other disciplines could learn so much by time investigation. You can't rely on written history. It turns out, in many cases, to be different than it actually was. A matter of emphasis or bias or of just poor interpretation, embalmed forever in the written form. But do these other departments provide any funds for time investigations? I'll answer that. They don't. A few of them, of course. The College of Law has co-operated splendidly, but not many of the others. They're afraid. They don't want their comfortable little worlds upset. Take this matter of Shakespeare, for example. You'd think English Lit would be grateful to find that Oxford wrote the plays. After all, it had been a question which had been talked about for many years — who really wrote the plays? But, after all of that, they resented it when Time found out."

"And now," said Maxwell, "Time is bringing Shakespeare
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forward to lecture about how he didn't write the plays. Don't you think that's rubbing it in just a bit too much?"

"That's not the point of it, at all," said Carol. "The point is that Time is forced to make a sideshow out of history to earn a little money. That's the way it is all the time. All sorts of schemes for raising money. Earning a lousy reputation as a bunch of clowns. You can't believe Dean Sharp enjoys —"

"I know Harlow Sharp," said Maxwell. "Believe me, he enjoys every minute of it."

"That is blasphemy," Oop said, in mock horror. "Don't you know that you can be crucified for blabbing off like that?"

"You're making fun of me," said Carol. "You make fun of everyone, of everything. You, too, Peter Maxwell."

"I apologize for them," said Ghost, "since neither one of them could summon up the grace to apologize, themselves. You have to live with them for ten or fifteen years to understand they really mean no harm."

"But the day will come," said Carol, "when Time will have the funds to do whatever it may want. All their pet projects and to hell with all the other colleges. When the deal goes —"

She stopped abruptly. She sat frozen, not moving. One could

sense that she wanted to put her hand up to her mouth and was refraining from it only by iron will.

“What deal?” asked Maxwell.

“I think I know,” said Oop. “I heard a rumor, just a tiny little rumor and I paid no attention to it. Although, come to think of it, these dirty little rumors are the ones that turn out to be true. The great big, ugly, noisy ones —”

“Oop, not a speech,” said Ghost. “Just tell us what you heard.”

“It’s incredible,” said Oop. “You never would believe it. Not in all your born days.”

“Oh, stop it!” Carol exclaimed.

They all looked at her and waited.

“I made a slip,” she said “I got all worked up and made a slip. Can I ask the three of you just please to forget it? I’m not even sure it’s true.”

“Certainly,” said Maxwell. “You’ve been exposed this evening to rough company and ill manners and”

She shook her head. “No,” she said. “No, it’s not any good to ask. I have no right to ask. I’ll simply have to tell you and trust to your discretion. And I’m pretty sure it’s true. Time has made an offer for the Artifact.”

Silence reverberated in the

room as the other three sat motionless, scarcely breathing. She looked from one to the other of them, not quite understanding.

Finally Ghost stirred slightly, and there was a rustling in the silence of the room, as if his white sheet had been an actual sheet that rustled when he moved.

“You do not comprehend,” he said, “the attachment that we three hold to the Artifact.”

“You struck us in a heap,” said Oop.

“The Artifact,” said Maxwell, softly. “The Artifact, the one great mystery, the one thing in the world that has baffled everyone”

“A funny stone,” said Oop.

“Not a stone,” said Ghost.

“Then, perhaps,” said Carol, “you’ll tell me what it is.”

And that was the one thing, Maxwell told himself, that Ghost nor no one else could do. Discovered ten years or so ago by Time investigators on a hilltop in the Jurassic Age, it had been brought back to the present at a great expenditure of funds and ingenuity. Its weight had demanded energy far beyond anything so far encountered to kick it forward into time, an energy requirement which had made necessary the projection backward in time of a portable nuclear generator, transported in many pieces and assembled on the site. And then

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the further task of bringing back the generator, since nothing of that sort, as a matter of simple ethics, could be abandoned in the past — even in the past of the far Jurassic.

"I cannot tell you," said Ghost. "There is no one who can tell you."

Ghost was right. No one had been able to make any sense of it at all. A massive block of some sort of material that now appeared to be neither stone nor metal, although at one time it had been thought to be a stone, and later on, a metal. It had defied all investigation. Six feet long, four feet on each side, it was a mass of blackness that absorbed no energy and emitted none, that bounced all light and other radiation from its surface, that could not be cut or dented, stopping a laser beam as neatly as if the beam had not existed. There was nothing that could scratch it, nothing that could probe it. It gave up no information of any sort at all. It rested on its raised base in the forecourt of Time Museum, the one thing in the world about which no one could even make a valid guess.

"Then," asked Carol, "why the consternation?"

"Because," said Oop, "Pete here has the hunch it may, at one time, have been the god of the Little Folk. That is, if the

lousy little stinkers had the capacity to recognize a god."

"I'm sorry," Carol said. "I am truly sorry. I didn't know. Perhaps if Time knew"

"There's not enough data," Maxwell said, "to make any talk about it. Just a hunch is all. Just a feeling from certain things I've heard among the Little Folk. But even they don't know. It was so long ago."

So long ago, he thought. For the love of God, almost two hundred million years ago!

VIII

"This Oop," said Carol. "I can't get over him. That funny house he has out at the end of nowhere."

"He'd be offended," said Maxwell, "if he heard you calling it a house. It's a shack, and he's proud of it — as a shack. The jump from cave to house would have been too great for him. He'd have felt uncomfortable."

"A cave? He really lived in a cave?"

"Let me tell you something about old friend Oop," said Maxwell. "He is an awful liar. You can't believe all the stories that he tells. The cannibalism, for instance"

"That makes me feel a little better. People eating one another!"

"Oh, there was cannibalism, all right. There is no doubt of that. But whether Oop himself was headed for the pot is another matter. On items of general information, he is reliable enough. It's only when he gets to yarn-ing about his personal experiences that you should begin to doubt him."

"It's funny," said Carol. "I've seen him around and have wondered a bit about him, but I never thought I'd meet him. Never really wanted to, in fact. Certain people I can draw a line at, and he was one of them. I imagined he would be uncouth —"

"Oh, he's uncouth," said Maxwell.

"But charming, too," said Carol.

Clear autumn stars shone frostily deep in the darkened sky. The roadway, almost unoccupied, wound its way along the ridge. Far below gleamed the far-spreading campus lights. The wind, blowing up the ridge, carried the faint smell of burning leaves.

"The fire was nice," said Carol. "Why is it, Peter, that we don't have fires? It would be so simple. A fireplace wouldn't be so hard to build."

"There was a time, several hundred years ago," said Maxwell, "when every house, or al-

most every house, had at least one fireplace. Sometimes several. The whole thing of having fires was a throwback, of course. Back to the days when fire was a protection and a warmth. But finally we outgrew it."

"I don't think we did," she said. "We just walked away, is all. Turned our back upon this one segment of our past. We still have need of fire. A psychological need, perhaps. I found that out tonight. It was so exciting and so comfortable. Primal, maybe, but there still must be some of the primal in us."

"Oop," he told her, "couldn't live without a fire. The lack of a fire was the thing that bugged him most when Time brought him back. He had to be held captive for a time, of course, when he first was brought here — closely watched over if not actually confined. But when he became his own master, so to speak, he got hold of a piece of land out at the edge of the campus and built himself the shack. Rough, the way he wanted it. And, of course, a fireplace. And a garden. You should see his garden. The idea of growing food was something new to him. Something that no one back in his day had ever thought about. Nails and saws and hammers, and even lumber, also were new to him, as was

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everything. But he was highly adaptable. He took to the new tools and ideas without a single hitch. Nothing astonished him. He used hammer and saw and lumber and all the rest of it to build the shack. But I think it was the garden that seemed the most wonderful to him — to grow one's food and not hunt for it. I suppose you noticed — even now he is impressed with the sheer bulk and the easy availability of food."

"And of liquor," said Carol.

Maxwell laughed. "Another new idea that he took to. A hobby of his, you might almost say. He makes his own. He's got a still out in the back of his woodshed, and he runs off some of the worst moonshine that ever trickled down your throat. Pretty vile stuff."

"But not to guests," said Carol. "That was whiskey tonight."

"You have to be a friend of his," said Maxwell, "before he'll allow you to drink his moon. Those fruit jars he set out . . ."

"I wondered about those. They seemed to have nothing in them."

"Clear, rotgut moonshine, that was what was in them."

"You said he was a captive once. And now? Just how closely is he tied to Time?"

"A ward of the college. Not really tied at all. But you couldn't drive him off. He's a more loyal

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partisan of Time than you are."

"And Ghost? He lives here at Supernatural? He's a ward of Supernatural?"

"Hardly. Ghost is a stray cat. He goes anywhere he wishes. He's got friends all over the planet. He's big stuff, I understand, at the College of Comparative Religions on the Himalayan Campus. But he manages to drop in here on a fairly regular basis. He and Oop hit it off from the moment Supernatural made its first contact with Ghost."

"Pete, you call him Ghost. What is he, really?"

"Why, he is a ghost."

"But what's a ghost?"

"I don't know. I don't think anybody does."

"But you're with Supernatural."

"Oh, sure, but all my work has been with the Little Folk, with emphasis on goblins, although I have an interest in every one of them. Even banshees, and there's nothing that comes meaner or more unreasonable than a banshee."

"There must be specialists in ghosts, then. What do they have to say about it?"

"I guess they have a few ideas. There are tons of literature on spookery, but I've never had the time to go into it. I know that back in the early ages it was believed that everyone, when they

died, turned into a ghost, but now, I understand, that no longer is believed. There are certain special circumstances that give rise to ghosts, but I don't know what they are."

"That face of his," said Carol. "A little spooky, maybe, but somehow fascinating. I had a hard time to keep from staring at him. Just a dark blankness folded inside his sheet which, I suppose, is not a sheet. And at times a hint of eyes. Little lights that could be eyes. Or was I imagining?"

"No. I've imagined them myself."

"Will you," asked Carol, "grab hold of that fool cat and pull him in a foot or so. He's slipping out onto the faster belt. He has no sense whatever. He'll go to sleep any time, at any place. Eat and sleep is all he thinks about."

Maxwell reached down and tugged Sylvester back into his original position. Sylvester growled and mumbled in his sleep.

Maxwell straightened and leaned back into his chair, looking up into the sky.

"Look at the stars," he said. "There is nothing like the skies of Earth. I'm glad to be back again."

"And now that you're back?"

"After I see you safely home

and pick up my luggage, I'm going back to Oop's. He'll have one of those fruit jars all unscrewed and we'll do some drinking and sit and talk till dawn, then I'll get into the bed he has for guests, and he'll curl up on his pile of leaves"

"I saw those leaves over in the corner and was consumed with curiosity. But I didn't ask."

"He sleeps there all the time. Not comfortable in a bed. After all, when for many years a pile of leaves has been the height of luxury —"

"You're trying to make a fool of me again."

"No, I'm not," said Maxwell. "I'm telling you the truth."

"I didn't mean what will you do tonight. I mean what will you do? You are dead, remember?"

"I'll explain," said Maxwell. "I'll continually explain. Everywhere I go there'll be people who'll want to know what happened. There might even be an investigation of some sort. I sincerely hope there won't, but I suppose there may have to be."

"I'm sorry," Carol said, "but, then, I'm also glad. How fortunate that there were two of you."

"If Transport could work it out," said Maxwell, "they might have something they could sell. All of us could keep a second one of us stashed away somewhere against emergency."

"But it wouldn't work," Carol pointed out. "Not personally. This other Peter Maxwell was a second person and — oh, I don't know. It's too late at night to get it figured out. But I'm sure it wouldn't work."

"No," said Maxwell. "No, I guess it wouldn't. It was a bad idea."

"It was a nice evening," said Carol. "I thank you so much for it. I had a lot of fun."

"And Sylvester had a lot of steak."

"Yes, he did. He'll not forget you. He loves folks who give him steak. He's nothing but a glutton."

"There is just one thing," said Maxwell. "One thing you didn't tell us. Who was it that made the offer for the Artifact?"

"I don't know. Just that there was an offer. Good enough, I gather, for Time to consider it. I simply overheard a snatch of conversation I was not supposed to hear. Does it make a difference?"

"It could," said Maxwell.

"I remember now," she said. "There was another name. Not the one who meant to buy it, or I don't think it was. Just someone who was involved. It had slipped my mind till now. Someone by the name of Churchill. Does that mean anything to you?"

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Oop was sitting in front of the fireplace, paring his toenails with a large jackknife, when Maxwell returned, carrying his bag.

Oop gestured with the knife toward the bed. "Sling it over there and then come and sit down with me. I've just put a couple of new logs on the fire and I have a jug half finished and a couple more hid out."

"Where's Ghost?" asked Maxwell.

"Oh, he disappeared. I don't know where he went; he never tells me. But he'll be back again. He never is gone long."

Maxwell put the bag on the bed, went over to the fireplace and sat down, leaning against its rough stone face.

"You played the clown tonight," he said, "somewhat better than you usually manage. What was the big idea?"

"Those big eyes of hers," said Oop, grinning. "And just begging to be shocked. I am sorry, Pete. I simply couldn't help it."

"All that talk about cannibalism and vomiting," said Maxwell. "That was pretty God damned low."

"Well," said Oop, "I guess I just got carried away. That's the way folks expect a crummy Neanderthal to act."

"The girl's no fool," said Maxwell. "She planted that story about the Artifact as neatly as I have ever seen it done."

"Planted it?"

"Sure, planted it. You don't think it just slipped out, do you, the way she pretended that it did?"

"I hadn't thought of that," said Oop. "Maybe she did. But if she did, why do you think she did it?"

"I would guess she doesn't want it sold. Figured that if she told it to a blabbermouth like you it would be all over the campus before noon tomorrow. A lot of talk about it, she might figure, would help to kill the deal."

"But you know, Pete, that I'm no blabbermouth."

"I know it. But you acted like one tonight."

Oop closed the jackknife and slid it in his pocket, picked up the half-empty fruit jar and handed it to Maxwell. Maxwell put it to his mouth and drank. The fiery liquid slashed like a knife along his throat, and he choked. He wished, he thought, that for once he could drink the stuff without choking on it. He took it down and sat there, gasping for breath.

"Potent stuff," said Oop. "Best batch I've run off for quite a while. Did you see the bead on it?"

Maxwell, unable to speak, nodded.

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Oop reached out and took the jar, tilted it up, lowered its level by an inch or more. He took it down and held it lovingly against his hairy chest. He let out his breath in a whoosh that made the flames in the fireplace dance. He patted the bottle with his free hand.

"First rate stuff," he said.

He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and sat, staring at the fire.

"She couldn't, certainly, have taken you for a blabbermouth," he finally said. "I notice that you did some fancy skating of your own tonight. All around the truth."

"Maybe because I don't entirely know the truth myself," said Maxwell. "Or what to do about it. You set to do some listening?"

"Any time," said Oop. "If that is what you want. Although you don't need to tell me. Not out of friendship. You know we'll still be friends if you tell me nothing. We don't even need to talk about it. There are a lot of other things we could talk about."

Maxwell shook his head. "I have to tell you, Oop. I have to tell someone, and you're the only one I would dare to tell. There's too much of it for me to go on carrying it alone."

Oop handed him the fruit jar. "Take another slug of that, then

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start any time you want. What I can't figure out is the goof by Transport. I don't believe it happened. I would make a guess that it was something else."

"And you'd be right," said Maxwell. There's a planet out there somewhere. Fairly close, I'd guess. A free-wheeling planet, not tied to any sun, although I gather that it could insert itself into a solar system any time it wishes."

"That would take some doing. It would mess up the orbits of all the other planets."

"Not necessarily," said Maxwell. "It wouldn't have to take an orbit in the same plane as the other planets. That would hold down the effect of its being there."

He lifted the fruit jar, shut his eyes, and took a healthy gulp. The top of his head came off, and his stomach bounced. He lowered the jar and leaned back against the roughness of the masonry. A wind was mewing in the chimney — a lonely sound, shut outside by the rough board walls. A log fell in the fireplace and sent up a shower of sparks. The flames danced high, and flickering shadows chased one another all about the room.

Oop reached out and took the jar out of Maxwell's hands, but did not drink immediately. He held it cuddled in his lap.

"So this other planet reached

out and copied your wave pattern," he said, "and there were two of you."

"How did you know that?"

"Deduction. It was the most logical way for it to happen. I know there were two of you. There was this other one who came back before you did. I talked with him, and he was you. He said there was no dragon; the Coonskin business had been a wild goose chase and so he came home ahead of his schedule."

"So that was it," said Maxwell. "I had wondered why he came back early."

"I'm hard put to it," said Oop, "to decide if I should rejoice or mourn. Perhaps a bit of both, leaving some room for wonderment at the strange workings of human destiny. This other man was you, and now he's dead and I have lost a friend. For he was a human being and a personality, and that humanity and personality came to an end with death. But now there's you. And if, before, I'd lost a friend, now I have regained that lost friend, for you are as truly Peter Maxwell as that other one."

"I was told an accident."

"I'm not so sure," said Oop. "I've been doing some thinking about it. Since you came back, I'm not so sure at all. He was getting off a roadway and he

tripped and fell, hit his head”

“You don’t trip when you’re getting off a roadway. Unless you’re drunk or crippled up or awkward. That outside belt is barely crawling.”

“I know,” said Oop. “That’s what the police thought, too. But there was no other explanation, and the police, as you well know, require some sort of explanation, so they can close the file. It was in a lonely place. About halfway between here and Goblin Reservation. No one saw it. Must have happened when there was almost no one traveling, maybe at night. He was found about ten o’clock in the morning. There would have been people traveling from six o’clock on, but probably they’d have been on the inner, faster belts. They wouldn’t have seen too much on the outside of the belt. The body could have been lying there for a long time before it was found.”

“You think it wasn’t an accident? It may have been murder?”

“I don’t know. The thought has occurred to me. There was one funny thing about it — something that never was explained. There was a funny smell about the body and the area. A strange sort of odor, like nothing no one had ever smelled before. Maybe someone found out that there were two of you. For some rea-

son, someone may not have wanted two of you”

“But who could have known there were two of me?”

“The people on that other planet. If there were people.”

“There were people,” Maxwell said. “It was a most amazing place.”

It all came back as he sat there talking, almost as if he were there again. A crystal place — or that had been what it had looked to be when he first had seen it. An extensive crystal plain that ran on and on and a crystal sky with pillars reaching from the plain and upward, apparently to the sky, although the tops of them were lost in the milkiness of sky — pillars soaring upward to hold the sky in place. An empty place, to make one think of a deserted ballroom of extensive size, all cleaned and polished for a ball, waiting for the music and the dancers who had never come and now would never come, leaving the ballroom empty through all eternity, shining in all its polished glitter and its wasted graciousness.

A ballroom, but a ballroom without any walls, running on and on, not to a horizon, for there seemed to be no horizon, but to a point where that strange, milk-glass sky came down to meet the crystal floor.

He stood astounded in the vast

immensity, an immensity not of boundless sky, for the sky was far from boundless, nor from great distances, for the distances were not great, but immensity that was measured as a room would be, as if one were in a giant's house and lost and were looking for a door, and without a clue as to where a door might be. A place with no distinguishing features, with each pillar like the next, with no cloud in the sky (if it were a sky), with each foot, each mile like every other foot and mile, level and paved with a crystal paving that stretched out in all directions.

He wanted to cry out, to ask if anyone were there, but was afraid to cry out — perhaps in the fear, although he did not realize it then and only thought it later, that a single sound would send all this cold and shining splendor shimmering into a cloud of frosty dust. For the place was silent, with no slightest whisper of a sound. Silent and cold and lonely, all its splendor and its whiteness lost in the loneliness.

Slowly, carefully, fearing that the scuff of his moving feet might bring this whole world into dust, he pivoted, and out of the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse — not of motion, but the flickering sense of motion, as if something had been there, but had moved so fast that his eyes had failed

to catch it. He halted, the short hairs prickling on the back of his neck, engulfed by the sense of utter strangeness rather than of actual danger, apprehensive of a strangeness so distorted and so twisted out of the normal human context that a man gazing at it might go mad before he had a chance to jerk his eyes away.

Nothing happened.

He moved again, pivoting inch by cautious inch, and now he saw that he had been standing with his back turned on what appeared to be an assemblage of some sort — an engine? An instrument? A machine?

And all at once he knew. Here was the strange contraption that had brought him here, this crazy crystal world's equivalent of matter transmitter and receiver.

But this, he knew at once, was not the Coonskin system. It was no place he had ever heard of.

Nowhere in the known universe was there a place like this. Something had gone wrong. He had been hurled, not to the Coonskin planet which had been his destination, but to some far, forgotten corner of the universe, to some area, perhaps, where man would not penetrate for another million years, so far away from Earth that the distances involved became unimaginable.

Now again there were flickering motions, as if living shadows moved against the crystal background. As he watched, the flickering flowed into shifting shape and form, and he could see that there were many moving shapes, all of them, strangely, separate entities that seemed to hold, within the flicker of them, individual personalities. As if, he thought in horror, they were things that had once been people. As if they might be alien ghosts.

"And I accepted them," he said to Oop. "I accepted them — on faith, perhaps. It was either that, or reject them and be left there, standing all alone upon that crystal plain. A man of a century ago, perhaps, would not have accepted them. He would have been inclined to sweep them out of his mind as pure imagination. But I had spent too many hours with Ghost to gag at the thought of ghosts. I had worked too long with supernatural phenomena to quibble at the idea of creatures and of events beyond the human pale.

"And the strange thing about it, the comforting thing about it, is that they sensed that I accepted them."

"And that is it?" asked Oop. "A planet full of ghosts?"

Maxwell nodded, "Perhaps that's one way of looking at it. But let me ask you — what really is a ghost?"

"A spook," said Oop. "A spirit."

"I know," said Oop, regretfully. "I was being a bit facetious, and there was no excuse for it. We don't know what a ghost is. Even Ghost doesn't know exactly what he is. He simply knows that he exists — and if anyone should know, he should. He has mulled over it a lot. He's thought about it deeply. He has communed with fellow ghosts, and there is no evidence. So you fall back upon the supernatural —"

"Which is not understood," said Maxwell.

"A mutation of some sort," suggested Oop.

"Collins thought so," said Maxwell. "But he stood alone. I know I didn't agree with him, but that was before I was on the crystal planet. Now I'm not so sure. What happens when a race reaches an end, when, as a race, it has passed through childhood and middle age and now has reached old age? A race dying as a man does, dying of old age. What does it do, then? It could die, of course. That's what one would expect of it. But suppose there was a reason that it couldn't die, suppose it had to hang on, had to stay alive for some overriding reason, that it could not allow itself to die?"

"If ghostliness really is a mutation," said Oop, "if they knew

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it was a mutation, if they were so far advanced they could control mutation”

He stopped and looked at Maxwell. “You think that’s what might have happened?”

“I think it might,” said Maxwell. “I am beginning to think very much it might.”

Oop handed across the fruit jar. “You need a drink,” he said. “And when you’re through with it, I’ll have one myself.”

X

Maxwell took the jar, holding it, not drinking right away. Oop reached out to the stack of wood, lifted a chunk in one massive fist and threw it on the fire. A spray of sparks gushed up the chimney. Outside the night wind moaned along the eaves.

Maxwell lifted the jar and drank. He choked, wishing that he could drink the stuff, just once, without choking on it. He handed the jar back to Oop. Oop lifted it, then took it down again without drinking. He squinted across its rim at Maxwell.

“You said something to live for. Some reason that they couldn’t die — that they had to keep on existing, any way they could.”

“That’s right,” said Maxwell. “Information. Knowledge. A planet crammed with knowledge.

A storehouse of knowledge — and I would doubt that a tenth of it duplicates our own. The rest of it is new, unknown. Some of it material we have never dreamed of. Knowledge that we may not ferret out short of a million years, if we ever ferret it. It is stored electronically, I suppose — arranging atoms in such a manner that each atom carries a bit of information. Stored in metal sheets, like the pages of a book, stacked in great heaps and piles, and each layer of atoms — yes, they are arranged in layers — carries separate information. You read the first layer and then go down to the second layer. Again, like pages in a book, each layer of atoms a page, one stacked atop the other. Each sheet of metal — don’t ask me, I can’t even guess, how many layers of atoms in each metal sheet. Hundreds of thousands, I would suspect.”

Oop lifted the jar hastily, took a tremendous gulp, part of the liquor spraying out across his woolly chest. He let out his breath in a lusty belch.

“They can’t abandon this knowledge,” said Maxwell. “They have to pass it on to someone who can use it. They have to stay alive, somehow, until they pass it on. And that, for the love of God, is where I come in. They commissioned me to sell it for them.”

"Sell it for them! A bunch of ghosts, hanging on by their very toenails! What would they want? What's the price they ask?"

Maxwell put up his hand and wiped his forehead, which had sprouted a sudden mist of sweat. "I don't know," he said.

"Don't know? How can you sell a thing if you don't know what it's worth, if you don't have an asking price?"

"They said they would tell me later. They said to get someone interested and they'd get word to me on what the price would be."

"That," said Oop, disgusted, "is a hell of a way to make a business deal."

"Yes, I know," said Maxwell.

"You have no hint of price?"

"Not the faintest. I tried to explain to them, and they couldn't understand. Maybe they refused to understand. And since then I have gone over it and over it and there's no way I can know. It all boils down, of course, to what a gang like that might want. And for the life of me, I can't think of a thing they'd want."

"Well," said Oop, "they picked the right place to make their sales pitch. How do you plan to go about it?"

"I'll go up and talk to Arnold."

"You pick them tough," said Oop.

"Look, I have to talk with Arnold and no one else. This can't go up through channels. Can't have a word of it leak out. On the surface, it sounds hare-brained. If the communications media or the gossip-mongers got hold of it, the University wouldn't dare to touch it. If it were known and they did consider it and the deal fell through — and, believe me, working in the dark, as I have to work, the deal could well fall through — there'd be just one loud guffaw all the way from here clear out to the Rim. It would be Arnold's neck and my neck."

"Pete, Arnold is nothing but a big stuffed shirt. You know that as well as I do. He's an administrator. He's running the business end of this University. I don't care if he has the title of president or not, he's just the manager. He doesn't give a damn about the academic end of it. He won't stick out his neck for three planets full of knowledge."

"The president of the university has to be an administrator . . ."

"If it could have come at any other time," mourned Oop, "you might have had a chance. But as it stands right now, Arnold is walking on a crate of eggs. Moving the administration from New York to this jerkwater campus."

"A campus," put in Maxwell, "with a great liberal tradition."

"University politics," declared Oop, "doesn't care about liberal traditions or any other kind of traditions."

"I suppose not," said Maxwell, "but Arnold's the man I have to see. I could wish it were someone else. I have no admiration for the man, but he's the one I have to work with."

"You could have turned it down."

"The job of negotiator? No, I couldn't, Oop. No man could have. They'd have had to find someone else and they might get someone who'd bungle it. Not that I'm sure I won't bungle it. But at least I'll try. And it's not only for us, it's for them I'm trying as well."

"You got to like these people?"

"I'm not sure just how much I liked them. Admired them, maybe. Felt sorry for them, maybe. They're doing what they can. They hunted for so long to find someone they could pass the knowledge on to."

"Pass it on? You said it was for sale."

"Only because there is something that they want. Or need. I wish I could figure out what it is. It would make everything so much easier for everyone concerned."

"Minor question — you talked with them. How did you go about it?"

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"The tablets," said Maxwell. "I told you about the tablets. The sheets of metal that carried information. They talked with me with tablets, and I talked with them the same way."

"But how could you read —"

"They gave me a contraption, like a pair of goggles, but big. It was a sort of bulky thing. I suppose it had a lot of mechanism in it. I'd put it on and then I could read the tablets. No script, just little jiggles in the metal. It's hard to explain. But you looked at the jiggles through the contraption that you wore and you knew what the jiggles said. It was adjustable, I found out later, so you could read the different atomic layers. But to start with, they only wrote me messages, if wrote is the word to use. Like kids writing back and forth to one another on slates. I wrote back to them by thinking into another contraption that was tied into the pair of goggles that I wore."

"A translator," said Oop.

"I suppose that's what it was. A two-way translator."

"We've tried to work one out," said Oop. "By 'we' I mean the combined ingenuity not only of the Earth, but of what we laughingly call the known galaxy."

"Yes, I know," said Maxwell.

"And these folks had one. These ghosts of yours."

"They have a whole lot more," said Maxwell. "I don't know what they have. I sampled some of what they had. At random. Just enough to convince myself they had what they said."

"One thing still bugs me," said Oop. "You said a planet. What about a star?"

"The planet is roofed over. There was a star, I gather, but you couldn't see it, not from the surface. The point is, of course, that there needn't be a star. You are acquainted, I think, with the concept of the oscillating universe."

"The yo-yo universe," said Oop. "The one that goes bang, and then bang, bang again."

"That's right," said Maxwell. "And now we can quit wondering about it. It happens to be true. The crystal planet comes from the universe that existed before the present universe was formed. They had it figured out, you see. They knew the time would come when all the energy would be gone and all the dead matter would start moving slowly back to form another cosmic egg, so that the egg could explode again and give birth to yet another universe. They knew they were approaching the death of the universe and that unless something were done, it would be death for them as well. So they

launched a project. A planetary project. They sucked in energy and stored it — don't ask me how they extracted it from wherever they extracted it or how they stored it. Stored somehow in the very material of the planet, so that when the rest of the universe went black and dead, they still had energy. They roofed the planet in, they made a house of it. They worked out propulsion mechanisms so they could move their planet, so that they would be an independent body moving independently through space. And before the inward drifting of the dead matter of the universe began, they left their star, a dead and blackened cinder by this time, and set out on their own. That's the way they have been since then, a holdover population riding on a planetary spaceship. They saw the old universe die, the one before this one. They were left alone in space, in space that had no hint of life, no glint of light no quiver of energy. It may be — I don't know — that they saw the formation of the brand new cosmic egg. They could have been very far from it and seen it. And if they saw it, they saw the explosion that marked the beginning of this universe we live in, the blinding flash, far off, that sent the energy streaking into space. They saw the first stars glow red; they saw

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the galaxies take shape. And when the galaxies had formed, they joined this new universe. They could go to any galaxy they chose, set up an orbit about any star they wished. They could move any time they wanted to. They were universal gypsies. But the end is nearing now. The planet, I suppose, could keep on and on, for the energy machinery must still be operative. I imagine there might be a limit to the planet, but they're not even close to that. But the race is dying out, and they have stored in their records the knowledge of two universes."

"Fifty billion years," said Oop. "Fifty billion years of learning."

"At least that much," said Maxwell. "It could be a great deal more."

They sat, silent, thinking of those fifty billion years. The fire mumbled in the chimney's throat. From far off came the chiming of the clock in Music Hall, counting off the time.

XI

Maxwell awoke. Oop was shaking him. "Someone here to see you."

Maxwell threw back the covers, hoisted his feet out on the floor, groped blindly for his trousers. Oop handed them to him.

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"Who is it?" he asked Oop. "Said his name was Longfellow. Nasty, high-nosed gent. He's waiting outside for you. You could see he wouldn't risk contamination by stepping in the shack."

"Then to hell with him," said Maxwell, starting to crawl back into bed.

"No, no," protested Oop. "I don't mind. I'm above insult."

Maxwell struggled into his trousers, slid his feet into his shoes and kicked them on.

"Any idea who this fellow is?"

"None at all," said Oop.

Maxwell stumbled across the room to the bench set against the wall, spilled water from the bucket standing there into a wash basin, bent and sloshed water on his face.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"A little after seven."

"Mr. Longfellow must have been in a hurry to see me."

"He's out there now, pacing up and down. Impatient."

Longfellow was impatient.

As Maxwell came out of the door, he hurried up to him and held out a hand.

"Professor Maxwell," he said, "I'm so glad I found you. It was quite a job. Someone told me you might be here —" he glanced at the shack, and his long nose crinkled just a trifle — "so I took the chance."

"Oop," said Maxwell quietly, "is an old and valued friend."

"Could we perhaps take a stroll?" suggested Longfellow. "It is an unusually fine morning. Have you breakfasted yet? No, I don't suppose you have."

"It might help," said Maxwell, "if you told me who you are."

"I'm in administration. Stephen Longfellow is the name. Appointments secretary to the president."

"Then you're just the man I want to see," said Maxwell. "I need an appointment with the president as soon as possible."

Longfellow shook his head. "I would say offhand that is quite impossible."

They fell into step and walked along the path that led down toward the roadway. Leaves of wondrous, shining yellow fell slowly through the air from a thick-branched walnut tree that stood beside the path. Down by the roadway a maple tree was a blaze of scarlet against the blueness of the morning sky. And far in that sky streamed a V-shaped flock of ducks heading southward.

"Impossible," said Maxwell. "You make it sound final. As if you'd thought about it and come to your decision."

"If you wish to communicate with Dr. Arnold," Longfellow told him coldly, "there are proper

channels. You must understand the president is a busy man."

"I understand all that," said Maxwell, "and I understand as well about the channels. Innumerable delays, a request passed on from hand to hand and the knowledge of one's communication spread among so many people —"

"Professor Maxwell," Longfellow said, "there is no use, it seems, to beat about the bush. You're a persistent man and, I suspect, a rather stubborn one, and with a man of that bent it is often best to lay it on the line. The president won't see you. He can't afford to see you."

"Because there seems to have been two of me? Because one of me is dead?"

"The press will be full of it this morning. All the headlines shouting about a man come back from the dead. Have you heard the radio, perhaps, or watched television?"

"No," Maxwell said, "I haven't."

"Well, when you get around to it you'll find that you've been made a three-ring circus. I don't mind telling you that it is embarrassing."

"You mean a scandal?"

"I suppose you could call it that. And administration has trouble enough without identifying itself with a situation such as

yours. There is this matter of Shakespeare, for example. We can't duck that one, but we can duck you."

"But surely," said Maxwell, "administration can't be too concerned with Shakespeare and myself as compared to all the other problems that it faces. There is the uproar over the revival of dueling at Heidelberg and the dispute over the ethics of employing certain alien students on the football squads and —"

"But can't you see," wailed Longfellow, "that what happens on this particular campus are the things that matter?"

"Because administration was transferred here? When Oxford and California and Harvard and half a dozen others —"

"If you ask me," Longfellow declared, stiffly, "it was a piece of poor judgment on the part of the board of regents. It has made things very difficult for administration."

"What would happen," asked Maxwell, "if I just walked up the hill and into administration and started pounding desks?"

"You know well enough. You'd be thrown out."

"But if I brought along a corps of the newspaper and television boys and they were outside watching?"

"I suppose then you wouldn't be thrown out. You might even

get to see the president. But I can assure you that under circumstances such as those you'd not get whatever it may be you want."

"So," said Maxwell, "I'd lose, no matter how I went about it."

"As a matter of fact," Longfellow told him, "I had come this morning on quite a different mission. I was bringing happy news."

"I can imagine that you were," said Maxwell. "What kind of sop are you prepared to throw me to make me disappear?"

"Not a sop," said Longfellow, much aggrieved. "I was told to offer you the post of dean at the experimental college the university is establishing out on Gothic IV."

"You mean that planet with all the witches and the warlocks?"

"It would be a splendid opportunity for a man in your field," Longfellow insisted. "A planet where wizardry developed without the intervention of other intelligences, as is the case on Earth."

"A hundred and fifty light-years distant," said Maxwell. "Somewhat remote and I would think it might be dreary. But I suppose the salary'd be good."

"Very good, indeed."

"No, thanks," said Maxwell. "I'm satisfied with my job, right here."

"What job?" asked Longfellow.

"Why, yes. I'm on the faculty."

Longfellow shook his head.

"Not any longer," he said. "Have you, by any chance, forgotten? You died more than three weeks ago. We can't let vacancies go unfilled."

"You mean I've been replaced?"

"Why, most certainly," Longfellow told him, nastily. "As it stands right now, you are unemployed."

XII

The waiter brought the scrambled eggs and bacon, poured the coffee, then went away and left Maxwell at the table. Through the wide expanse of window, Lake Mendota stretched away, a sheet of glassy blue, with the faint suggestion of purple hills on the other shore. A squirrel ran down the bole of the gnarled oak tree that stood just outside the window and halted, head downward, to stare with beady eyes at the man sitting at the table. A brown and red oak leaf planed down deliberately, from branch to ground, wobbling in the tiny thermal currents of air. On the rocky shore a boy and girl walked slowly, hand in hand, through the lakeshore's morning hush.

It would have been civilized

and gracious, Maxwell told himself, to have accepted Longfellow's invitation to eat breakfast with him. But he had had all that he could take of the appointments secretary. All he wanted was to be alone, to gain a little time to sort out the situation and to do some thinking — although probably he could not afford the time for thinking.

Oop had been right. It was apparent now that to see the university president would be no easy task, not only because of that official's busy schedule and his staff's obsession of doing things through channels, but because for some reason, not entirely understood, this matter of twin Peter Maxwells had assumed the proportions of a scandal from which Arnold had the fervent wish to be disassociated. Maxwell wondered, sitting there and gazing out the window at the pop-eyed, staring squirrel, whether this attitude of the administration might go back to the interview with Drayton. Had Security zeroed in on Arnold? It didn't seem likely. But it was a possibility. The depth of Arnold's jittery attitude was emphasized by the hurried offer of the post on Gothic IV. Not only did administration want nothing to do with this second Peter Maxwell, it wanted him off the Earth as well, buried on a planet where in the

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space of a little time he would be forgotten.

It was understandable that his post at Supernatural had been filled after the death of the other Peter Maxwell. After all, classes must go on. Gaps could not be left in the faculty. But even so, there were other positions that could have been found for him. The fact that this had not been done, that the Gothic IV position had been so quickly offered, was evidence enough that he was not wanted on the Earth.

Yet it all was strange. Administration could not have known until sometime yesterday that two Peter Maxwells had existed. There could not have been a problem, there'd have been no basis for a problem, until that word had been received. Which meant, Maxwell told himself, that someone had gotten to administration fast — someone who wanted to get rid of him, someone who was afraid that he would interfere.

But interfere in what? And the answer to that seemed so glib and easy that he felt, instinctively, that it must be wrong. But search as he might, there was one answer only — that someone else knew of the hoard of knowledge on the crystal planet and was working to get hold of it.

There was one name to go on.
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Carol had said Churchill — that Churchill somehow was involved in the offer that had been made to Time for the Artifact. Was it possible that the Artifact was the price of the crystal planet's knowledge? One couldn't count on that, of course, although it might be so, for no one knew what the Artifact might be.

That Churchill was working on the deal was no surprise at all. Not for himself, of course, but for someone else. For someone who could not afford to have his identity revealed. It was in deals such as this that Churchill might prove useful. The man was a professional fixer and knew his way around. He had contacts and through long years of operation undoubtedly had laid out various pipelines of information into many strange and powerful places.

And if such were the case, Maxwell's job became much harder. Not only must he guard against the rumor-mongering that was implicit in administration channels, he must now be doubly sure that none of his information fell into other hands where it might be used against him.

The squirrel had gone on down the tree trunk and now was busily scrounging on the slope of lawn that ran down to the lake, rustling through the fallen leaves



in search of an acorn he might somehow have missed before. The boy and girl had walked out of sight and now a hesitant breeze was softly rumpling the surface of the lake.

There were only a few others at breakfast in the room; most of those who had been there when Maxwell entered had finished now and left. From the floor above came the distant murmuring of voices, the scuffling of feet as the daily flow of students began to fill the Union, the off-hours gathering place of undergraduates.

The Union was one of the oldest structures on the campus and one of the finest. For over five hundred years it had been the meeting place, the refuge, the study hall of many generations. It had settled easily and comfortably into the functional tradition that made it a second home for many thousand students. Here could be found a quietness for reflection or for study, here the cozy corners needed for good talk, here the game rooms for billiards or for chess, here the eating places, here the meeting halls, and tucked off in odd corners little reading rooms with their shelves of books.

Maxwell pushed back his chair, but stayed sitting, finding himself somehow reluctant to get up and leave — for once he left this

place, he knew, he'd plunge into the problems he must face. Outside the window lay a golden autumn day, warming as the sun rose in the sky — a day for showers of golden leaves, for blue haze on the distant hills, for the solemn glory of chrysanthemums bedded in the garden, for the quiet glow of goldenrod and aster in the fields and vacant lots.

From behind him he heard the scurrying of many hard-shod feet and when he swung around in his chair, he saw the owner of the feet advancing rapidly across the squared red tiles toward him.

It looked like an outsize, land-going shrimp, with its jointed legs, its strangely canted body with long, weird rods — apparently sensory organs — extending outward from its tiny head. Its color was an unhealthy white and its three globular black eyes bobbed on the ends of long antennae.

It came to a halt beside the table. The three antennae swiveled to aim the three eyes straight at Maxwell.

It said in a high, piping voice, the skin of its throat fluttering rapidly beneath the seemingly inadequate head, "Informed I am that you be Professor Peter Maxwell."

"The information happens to be right," said Maxwell. "I am Peter Maxwell."

"I be a creature out of the world you would name Spearhead 27. Name I have is of no interest to you. I appear before you carrying out commission by my employer. Perhaps you know it by designation of Miss Nancy Clayton."

"Indeed I do," said Maxwell, thinking that it was very much like Nancy Clayton to employ an outlandish creature such as this as an errand boy.

"I work myself through education," explained the Shrimp, "doing anything I find."

"That's commendable," said Maxwell.

"I train in mathematics of time," declared the Shrimp. "I concentrate on world-line configurations. I am in tizzy over it."

The Shrimp didn't look as if it were in any sort of tizzy.

"Why all the interest?" Maxwell asked. "Something in your background? Something in your cultural heritage?"

"Oh, very much indeed. Is completely new idea. On my world, no thought of time, no appreciation such a thing as time. Am much shocked to learn of it. And excited, too. But I digress too greatly. I come here on an errand. Miss Clayton desires to know can you attend a party the evening of this day. Her place, eight by the clock."

"I believe I can," said Maxwell.

"Tell her I always make a point of being at her parties."

"Overjoyed," said the Shrimp. "She so much wants you there. You are talked concerning."

"I see," said Maxwell.

"You hard to find. I run hard and fast. I ask in many places. Finally victorious."

"I am sorry," Maxwell said, "I put you to such trouble."

He reached into his pocket and took out a bill. The creature extended one of its forward legs and grasped the bill in a pair of pincers, folded it and refolded it and tucked it into a small pouch that extruded from its chest.

"You kind beyond expectation," it piped. "There is one further information. Occasion for party is unveiling of painting, recently acquired. Painting lost and gone for very long. By Albert Lambert, Esquire. Great triumph for Miss Clayton."

"I just bet it is," said Maxwell. "Miss Clayton is a specialist in triumphs."

"She, as employer, is gracious," said the Shrimp, reprovingly.

"I am sure of that," said Maxwell.

The creature shifted swiftly and galloped from the room. Listening to its departure, Maxwell heard it clatter up the stairs to the street level of the building.

Maxwell got up and headed for the stairs himself. If he were

going to witness the unveiling of a painting, he told himself, he'd better bone up on the artist. Which was exactly, he thought with a grin, what almost every other person invited to Nancy's party would be doing before the day was out.

Lambert? The name held a slight ring of recognition. He had read somewhere about him, probably long ago. An article in a magazine, perhaps, to help pass an idle hour.

XIII

Maxwell opened the book. "Albert Lambert," said the opening page of text, "was born in Chicago, Illinois, Jan. 11, 1973. Famed as a portrayer of grotesque symbolism, his early years gave no promise of his great accomplishments. His initial work was competent and showed a skillful craftsmanship and a deep insight into his subject matter, but it was not particularly outstanding. His grotesque period came after his fiftieth year. Rather than developing, it burst into full flower almost overnight, as if the artist had developed it secretly and did not show his canvasses of this period until he was satisfied with this new phase of his work. But there is no evidence that this actually was the case. Rather, there seems to be

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some evidence that it was not."

Maxwell flipped over the text pages to reach the color plates and leafed quickly through examples of the artist's early work. And there, in the space of one page to the next, the paintings changed — the artistic concept, the color, even, it seemed to Maxwell, the very craftsmanship. As if the work had been that of two different artists, the first tied intellectually to some inner need of orderly expression, the second engulfed, obsessed, ridden by some soul-shaking experience of which he tried to cleanse himself by spreading it on canvas.

Stark, dark, terrible beauty beat out of the page. In the dusky silence of the library reading room it seemed to Maxwell that he could hear the leathery whisper of black wings. Outrageous creatures capered across an outrageous landscape, and yet the landscape and the creatures, Maxwell sensed at once, were not mere fantasy, were no whimsical product of a willful unhinging of the mind, but seemed to be solidly based upon some outrageous geometry predicated upon a logic and an outlook alien to anything he had ever seen. The form, the color, the approach and the attitude were not merely twisted human values. One had the instant feeling that they might be, instead, the prosaic representation

of a situation in an area entirely outside any human value. Grotesque symbolism, the text had said, and it might be there, of course. But if so, Maxwell told himself, it was symbolism that could only be arrived at most tortuously after painful study.

He turned the page. There it was again, that complete divergence from humanity — a different scene with different creatures against a different landscape, but carrying, as had that first plate, the shattering impact of actuality, no figment of the artist's mind, but the representation of a scene he once had gazed upon and sought now to expurgate from mind and memory. As a man might wash his hands, Maxwell thought, lathering them fiercely with a bar of strong, harsh soap, scrubbing them again and yet again, endlessly, in a desperate attempt to remove by physical means a psychic stain that he had incurred. A scene that he had gazed upon, perhaps, not through human eyes, but through the alien optics of a lost and unguessed race.

Maxwell sat fascinated, staring at the page, wanting to pull his eyes away, but unable to. He was trapped by the weird and awful beauty, by some terrible, hidden purpose that he could not understand. Time, the Shrimp had

said, was something that his race had never thought of, a universal factor that had not impinged upon his culture. And here, captured in these color plates, was something that man had never thought of, never dreamed of.

He reached out his hand to grasp the book and close it, but he hesitated as if there were some reason he should not close the book, some compelling reason to continue staring at the plate.

And in that hesitancy, he became aware of a certain strangeness that might keep him staring at the page — a puzzling factor that he had not recognized consciously, but that had been nagging at him.

He took his hands away and sat staring at the plate. Then slowly he turned the page. As he glanced at that third plate, the strangeness leaped out at him — a brushed-in flickering, an artistic technique that made an apparent flickering, as if some thing of substance were there and flickering, seen one moment, not quite seen the next.

He sat, slack-jawed, and watched the flickering. It was a trick of the eyes, most likely, encouraged by the mastery of the artist over paint and brush. But trick of the eye or not, easy of recognition by anyone who had seen the ghostly race of the crystal planet.

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And through the hushed silence of the dusky room one question hammered at him: How could Albert Lambert have known about the people of the crystal planet?

“I had heard about you,” Allen Preston said. “It seemed incredible, of course. But the source of my information seemed unimpeachable, and I made an effort to get in touch with you. I’m a bit worried over this situation, Pete. As an attorney, I’d say you were in trouble.”

Maxwell sat down in the chair in front of Preston’s desk. “I suppose I am,” he said. “For one thing, it appears I’ve lost my job. Is there such a thing as tenure in a case like mine?”

“A case like yours?” the attorney asked. “Just what is the situation? No one seems to know. Everyone is talking about it, but no one seems to know. I, myself”

Maxwell grinned, wryly. “Sure. You’d like to know. You’re puzzled and confused and not quite sure you’re sane. You sit there wondering if I’m really Peter Maxwell.”

“Well, are you?” Preston asked.

“I am sure I am. I wouldn’t blame you, or anyone, if you doubted it. There were two of us. Something happened to the wave pattern. One of us went to the

Coonskin system, the other somewhere else. The one who went to Coonskin came back to Earth and died. I came back yesterday.”

“And found that you were dead.”

Maxwell nodded. “My apartment had been rented, my possessions all are gone. The university tells me my position has been filled and I’m without a job.”

Preston leaned back in his chair and squinted thoughtfully at Maxwell. “Legally,” he said, “I think we’d find that the university stands on solid ground. You are dead, you see. You have no tenure now. Not, at least, until it can be re-established.”

“Through a long process at law?”

“Yes, I would suspect so. I can’t give you an honest answer. There is no precedent. Oh, there are cases of mistaken identity — someone who is dead being mistakenly identified as someone who is still alive. But with you, there’s no mistake. A man who undeniably was Peter Maxwell is undeniably dead. There is no precedent for that. We’d have to set our own precedent as we went along, a very laborious beating through the thickets of legal argument. It might take years. To tell you the truth, I’m not sure where or how to start. Oh, it could be developed, it could be carried

forward, but it would take a lot of work and thought. First, of course, we'd have to establish who you are."

"Who I really *am*? For God's sake, Al! We know who I am."

"But the law doesn't. The law wouldn't recognize you as you are today. You have no legal being. Absolutely none. All your identification cards have been turned in to Records and have been filed by now"

"But I have those cards," said Maxwell quietly. "Right here in my pocket."

Preston stared at him. "Yes, come to think of it, I suppose you have. Oh Lord, what a mess!"

He got up and walked across the room, shaking his head. At the wall, he turned around and came back. He sat down again.

"Let me think about it," he said. "Give me a little time. I can dig up something. We have to dig up something. And there's a lot to do. There's the matter of your will"

"My will? I'd forgot about the will. Never thought of it."

"It's in probate. But I can get a stay of some sort."

"I willed everything to my brother, who's with the Exploratory Service. I could get in touch with him, although it might be quite a chore. He's usually out

with the fleet. But the point is that there'll be no trouble there, as soon as he knows what happened."

"Not with him," said Preston. "But the court's a different matter. It can be done, of course, but it may take time. Until it's cleared, you'll have no claim to your estate. You own nothing except the clothes you stand in and what is in your pockets."

"The University offered me a post on Gothic IV. Dean of a research unit. But at the moment, I'm not about to take it."

"How are you fixed for cash?"

"I'm all right. For the present. Oop took me in, and I have some money. If I had to, I could pick up some sort of job. Harlow Sharp would help me out if I needed something. Go on one of his field trips, if nothing else. I think I might like that."

"But don't you have to have some sort of Time degree?"

"Not if you go as a working member of the expedition. To hold a supervisory post of some sort, it would take one, I suppose."

"Before I start moving," Preston said, "I'll have to know the details. Everything that happened."

"I'll write out a statement for you. Have it notarized. Anything you want."

"Seems to me," said Preston,

"we might file action against Transportation. They put you in this mess."

Maxwell hedged. "Not right now," he said. "We can think of it later on."

"You get that statement put together," Preston told him. "And in the meantime, I'll do some thinking and look up some law. Then we can make a start. Have you seen the papers or looked at television?"

Maxwell shook his head. "I haven't had the time."

"They're going wild," said Preston. "It's a wonder they haven't cornered you. They must be looking for you. All they have as yet is conjecture. You were seen last night at the Pig & Whistle by a lot of people. The line right now is that you've come back from the dead. If I were you, I'd keep out of their way. If they should catch up with you, tell them absolutely nothing."

"I have no intention to," said Maxwell.

They sat in the quiet office, looking silently at one another.

"What a mess!" said Preston, finally. "What a lovely mess! I believe, Pete, I might just enjoy this."

"By the way," said Maxwell, "Nancy Clayton invited me to a party tonight. I've been wondering if there might be some connection — although there

needn't be. Nancy used to invite me on occasion."

Preston grinned. "Why, you're a celebrity. You'd be quite a catch for Nancy."

"I'm not too sure of that," said Maxwell. "She must have heard I had shown up. She'd be curious, of course."

"Yes," said Preston, drily, "she would be curious."

XIV

Maxwell expected that he might find newsmen lying in wait for him at Oop's shack, but there was no one there. Apparently the word hadn't spread that he was staying there.

The shack stood in the drowsiness of late afternoon, with the autumn sunlight pouring like molten gold over the weather-beaten lumber scraps of which it had been built. A few bees buzzed lazily in a bed of asters that grew outside the door and down the stretch of hillside above the roadway a few yellow butterflies drifted in the hazy afternoon.

Maxwell opened the door and stuck in his head. There was no one there. Oop was off prowling somewhere, and there was no sign of Ghost. A banked fire glowed redly in the fireplace.

Maxwell shut the door and sat down on the bench that stood before the shack.

Far to the west one of the campus' four lakes shone as a thin blue lens. The countryside was painted brown and yellow by dead sedges and dying grasses. Here and there little islands of color flared in scattered groups of trees.

Warm and soft, thought Maxwell. A land that one could dream in. Unlike those violent, gloomy landscapes that Lambert had painted so many years ago.

He sat wondering why those landscapes should stick so tightly, like a burr against his mind. Wondering, too, how the artist could have known how the ghostly inhabitants of the crystal planet flickered. It could not be merely happenstance; it was not the sort of thing a man might readily imagine. Reason said that Lambert must have known about those ghostly people; reason just as plainly said it was impossible.

And what about all those other creatures, all those other grotesque monstrosities Lambert had spread with an insane, vicious brush across the canvasses? Where did they fit in? Where might they have come from? Or were they simply mad figments of imagination, torn raw and bleeding from a strangely tortured mind? Were the people of the crystal planet the only authentic creatures Lambert had depicted? It did not seem too

likely. Somewhere or other, somehow or other, Lambert must have seen these other creatures, too. And was the landscape pure imagination, brushed in to maintain the mood established by the creatures, or might it have been the landscape of the crystal planet at some other time, before it had been fixed forever in the floor and roof that shut it in against the universe? But that, he told himself, was impossible! The planet had been enclosed before the present universe was born. Ten billion years at least, perhaps as much as fifty billion.

Maxwell stirred uneasily. It made no sense at all. None of it made any sort of sense. He had trouble enough, he told himself, without worrying about Lambert's paintings. He had lost his job, his estate was locked in probate, he didn't have a legal standing as a human being.

But none of that mattered too much, not right now, anyhow. First came the matter of the hoard of knowledge on the crystal planet. It was a knowledge the University must have — a body of knowledge in the known galaxy. Some of it would duplicate what was already known, but there would be other huge areas of understanding which were yet unthought of. The little that he had had the time to see bolstered that belief.

Once again, it seemed, he was hunkered down before the table, almost like a coffee table, on which he'd piled the metal sheets he had taken from the shelves, and with the contraption that was a reader, an interpreter, call it what one might, fastened to his head.

There had been the sheet of metal that talked about the mind, not in metaphysical nor in philosophical terms, but as a mechanism, employing terms and concepts that he could not grasp. He had struggled with the terminology, for he knew that here was understanding no human yet had touched, but it was beyond him. And there was that other piece of metal, a basic text on the application of certain mathematical principles to the social sciences, although some of the social sciences that were mentioned he could only guess at, groping after the concepts as a blind man might grope after flitting butterflies. There had been histories not of one universe, but two — and natural history which had told of life forms so fantastic in their basic principles and their functions that they seemed unbelievable, and a very thin sheet of metal, so thin it bent and twisted, like a sheet of paper, when he handled it, that had been so far beyond his understanding that he could not quite be sure

what it was about. And a thicker piece of metal, a much thicker piece, wherein he read the thoughts and philosophies of creatures and of cultures long since gone to dust that had sent him reeling back, frightened, disgusted, outraged and dismayed, but still full of a fearful wonder, at the utter inhumanity expressed in those philosophies.

All that and more, much more, a trillion times more, was waiting out there on the crystal planet.

It was important, he reminded himself, that he carry out the assignment that he had been given. It was vital that the library of the crystal planet be attained, and quickly. For if he failed there was a good possibility that the planet would seek another market, offer what it had in another sector of the galaxy, or perhaps out of the galaxy entirely.

The Artifact, he told himself, could be the price.

A flight of blackbirds came swirling down out of the sky, skimming just above the roof of the shack, sailing over the roadway. Maxwell watched them settle into the dying vegetation of a stretch of marsh, balancing their bodies delicately on the bending stems of rank-growing weeds, come there to feed for an hour or so before flying off to

roost in some secluded woodland they had picked as bivouac on their migration southward.

Maxwell got up and stretched. The peace and the quiet of the tawny afternoon had soaked into his body. He'd like a nap, he thought. After a time Oop would come back home and wake him and they'd have something to eat and talk for a while before he went off to Nancy's.

He opened the door and went into the shack, crossing the floor to sit upon the bed. Maybe, he thought, he ought to see if he still had a clean shirt and an extra pair of socks to don before the party. He reached out and hauled his bag off the floor and dumped it on the bed.

Opening the catches, he threw back the lid and took out a pair of trousers to get at the shirts that were packed beneath them. The shirts were there and so was something else, a contraption with a headband and two eyepieces folded up against it.

He stared at it in wonder, recognizing it. It was the translator which he had used on the crystal planet to read the metal tablets. He lifted it out and let it dangle in his hand. Here was the band to clamp around the head, with the power pack in the back, and the two eyepieces one flipped down into position once the device was fastened on the head.

He must have packed it by mistake, he thought, although he could not, for the life of him, remember packing it. But there it was. Perhaps no harm was done. It might even be used at some future time to help substantiate his claim he had been on the planet. It was not good evidence. It was just a gadget that had an ordinary look about it, although it might not seem so ordinary if someone poked around in the mechanism of it.

A light tapping came from somewhere. Maxwell, surprised by so small a noise, stiffened and held himself rigid, listening. Perhaps a wind-blown branch, he thought, tapping on the roof, although it didn't sound like a branch against the roof.

The tapping stopped and then began again, this time not a steady rapping, but rather like a code. Three quick taps and then a pause, followed by two rapid taps and then another pause, with the pattern of the tapping repeated once again.

It was someone at the door.

Maxwell got up from the bed and stood undecided. It might be newsmen who had finally tracked him down. If that should be the case, it might be best to leave the door unanswered. But the tapping didn't seem boisterous enough, or demand-

ing enough, for a newsman who had finally run him to his lair. The taps were soft, almost tentative, the kind of tapping that might be done by someone who did not want to advertise his presence.

The tapping took up again. Maxwell trudged to the door and threw it open. Outside stood the Shrimp, a ghostly, gleaming white in the wash of sunlight. Beneath one of his limbs, which now served as an arm rather than a leg, he clutched a paper-wrapped bundle tight against his body.

"For the love of God, come in," said Maxwell, sharply, "before someone sees you here."

The Shrimp came in. Maxwell closed the door, wondering what it was that had caused him to urge it in.

"You need no apprehension," said the Shrimp, "about news harvesters. I was careful and I noticed. No one followed me. I'm such a foolish-looking creature no one ever follows me. No one ever accords to me any purpose whatsoever."

"That is a fortunate thing to have," said Maxwell. "I think that it is called protective coloration."

"I appear again," said Shrimp, "on behalf of Miss Nancy Clayton. She knows you carried little on your trip, have had no chance to shop or have laundry done.

No wish to embarrass — charging me to say this with **goodly** emphasis — but wish to **send** you clothes to wear."

He took the bundle **from** underneath his arm and **handed** it to Maxwell.

"That is nice of Nancy."

"She is a thoughtful person. She commissioned me to say further."

"Go ahead," said Maxwell.

"There will be wheeled vehicle to take you to the **house**."

"There is no need of that," said Maxwell. "The roadway runs right past her place."

"Once again apology," said the Shrimp, with firmness, "but she thinks it best. There is much hithering and thithering, by many types of creatures, to learn your whereabouts."

"Can you tell me," asked Maxwell. "how Miss Clayton knows my whereabouts?"

Said the Shrimp, "I truly do not know."

"All right, then. You'll thank Miss Clayton for me?"

"With gladness," said the Shrimp.

XV

"I'll take you around to the back," the driver said. "There is a swarm of **newsmen** hanging around out front. They'll be gone later on, but **now** they're

there in droves. Miss Clayton suggested you might not want to meet them."

"Thank you," Maxwell said. "It is thoughtful of you."

Nancy, he told himself, had taken over, as was her usual practice, viewing it as her prerogative to order people's lives.

Her house stood on the low bluff that hemmed in the western edge of the lake. Off to the left the water gleamed softly in the early moonlight. The front of the house was ablaze with light, but the back was dark.

The car turned off the highway and climbed slowly along a narrow driveway lined by massive oaks. A startled bird flew squawking across the roadway, a flurry of desperately beating wings caught for a moment in the headlights. A pair of dogs came raging down the hollow tunnel of the drive, split and swung on either side the car.

The driver chuckled. "If you were walking, they'd eat you alive."

"But why?" asked Maxwell. "Why, all at once, must Nancy be guarded by a dog pack?"

"Not Miss Clayton," the driver said. "It is someone else."

The question came to Maxwell's tongue, but he choked it back.

The driver swung the car into a curved driveway that ran be-

neath an open portico and pulled up to a halt.

"In the back door," the driver said. "You don't need to knock. Then straight down the hall past the curved staircase. The party's up in front."

Maxwell started to open the car door, then hesitated.

"You need not mind the dogs," the driver told him. "They recognize the car. Anyone who steps out of it is okay with them."

There was, in fact, no sign of the dogs, and Maxwell went swiftly up the three steps of the stoop, opened the back door and stepped into the hall.

The hall was dark. A little light filtered down the winding staircase — someone apparently had left on a light on the second story. But that was all; there were no other lights. From somewhere in the front of the house came the muffled sound of revelry.

He stood for a moment without moving. As his eyes became accustomed to the darkness he could see that the hall ran for some distance toward the center of the house, past the foot of the winding stairs and beyond. There was a door back there, or perhaps an abrupt turn in the hall, that would take him party-ward.

It was strange, he told himself. If Nancy had instructed the driver to bring him to the back,

she would have had someone there to greet him, or at least would have seen that there was a light so he could find his way.

Strange, and very awkward, to arrive this way, to grope his way along the hall in search of the others who were there. For a moment he considered turning about and leaving, making his way back to Oop's place. Then he remembered the dogs. They would be out there and waiting and they looked like vicious brutes.

This whole business, he told himself, was not at all like Nancy. Nancy wouldn't do a thing like this. There was something very wrong, and he did not like it.

He moved cautiously down the hall, alert for chair or table that might be there to trip him up. He could see a little better now, but the hall was still a tunnel without any details.

He passed the stairs, skirting around their base, and now, with the light from the stairway partially cut off, the hall became darker than it was before.

A voice asked, "Professor Maxwell? Is that you, Professor?"

Maxwell stopped in mid-stride, balancing on one leg, then carefully put his lifted foot down against the floor and stood, not stirring, while goose bumps prickled on his skin.

"Professor Maxwell," said the voice, "I know that you're there."

GOBLIN RESERVATION

It was not a voice, actually, or it didn't seem to be. There had been no sound, Maxwell could have sworn, yet he had heard the words, not so much, perhaps, in his ear, as somewhere in his brain.

He felt the terror mounting in him and he tried to fight off, but it didn't go away. It stayed, crouched somewhere out there in the dark, ready to rush in.

He tried to speak and gulped instead. The voice said, "I've waited here for you, Professor. I want to communicate with you. It is to your interest as much as it is to mine."

"Where are you?" Maxwell asked.

"Through the door just to your left."

"I do not see a door."

Good common sense hammered hard at Maxwell. Break and run, it said. Get out of here as fast as you can go.

But he couldn't break and run. He couldn't bring himself to do it. And if he ran, which way should he run? Not back to the door, for the dogs were waiting out there. Not clattering down the darkened hall, more than likely to bump into something and raise a terrible clatter, to alert the guests up there in front and to be found, when they investigated, disheveled and bruised and sweating with his fear.

For if he ran, he knew, fear would pounce upon him and he'd give way to it.

It was bad enough sneaking in from the back door on a party without being found in a condition such as that.

If it had been just a voice, any kind of voice, it would not have been so frightening, but it was a strange kind of voice — there was no intonation to it, and there was about it a certain raw, mechanical, almost rasping quality.

It was not a human voice, Maxwell told himself. There was an alien in that room.

"There is a door," the flat, hard voice said. "Step slightly to your left and push against it."

The whole thing was becoming ridiculous, Maxwell told himself. Either he went through the door or he broke and ran. He might try to simply walk away, but he knew that the minute he turned his back upon that hidden door, he would run — not because he wanted to, but because he had to, running from the fear he had turned his back upon.

He stepped to the left, found the door, and pushed. The room was dark, but from a lamp somewhere in the yard outside, some light filtered through the windows, falling on a roly-poly creature that stood in the center of

the room, its pudgy belly gleaming with a writhing phosphorescence, as if a group of luminescent sea-dwellers had been prisoned in a bowl.

"Yes," the creature said, "you are quite right. I am one of those beings that you call a Wheeler. For my visit here I have given myself a designation that falls easy on your mind. You may call me Mr. Marmaduke. For convenience only, I suspect you understand, for it's not my name. In fact, none of us have names. They are unnecessary. Our personal identity is achieved in another way."

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Marmaduke," said Maxwell, speaking slowly, the only way he could, since his lips had become, like the rest of him, slightly stiff and frozen.

"And I you, Professor."

"How did you know who I was?" asked Maxwell. "You seemed to have no doubt at all. You knew, of course, I'd be coming down the hall."

"Of course," the Wheeler said.

Now Maxwell could see the creature a bit more clearly, the bloated body supported on two wheels, the lower part of the body gleaming and twisting like a pail of worms.

"You are Nancy's guest?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Marmaduke,

"certainly I am. The guest of honor, I believe, at this gathering."

"Then, perhaps, you should be out with the other guests."

"I pleaded tiredness," said Mr. Marmaduke. "A slight prevarication, I must admit, since I am never tired. So I went to rest a while"

"And to wait for me?"

"Precisely," said Mr. Marmaduke.

Nancy, Maxwell thought. No, Nancy, he was sure, wasn't in on it. She had a frothy brain, and all she cared about were her everlasting parties, and she'd be incapable of any kind of subtle intrigue.

"There is a subject we can talk about," said Mr. Marmaduke, "with some profit, I presume, to both of us. You are looking for a buyer for a large commodity. I might have some interest in that particular commodity."

Maxwell moved back a step and tried to find an answer. But there was no ready answer. Although he should have known, he told himself, or have at least suspected.

"You say nothing," said Mr. Marmaduke. "I cannot be mistaken. You are, without fail, the agent for the sale?"

"Yes," said Maxwell. "Yes, I am the agent."

There was no use denying it, he knew. Somehow or other, this creature in the room knew about the other planet and the hoard of knowledge. And he might know the price as well. Could it have been the Wheeler, he wondered, who had made the offer for the Artifact?

"Well, then," said Mr. Marmaduke, "let us proceed immediately to business and a discussion of the terms. Not forgetting, in the course of it, to mention the commission that will be coming to you."

"I am afraid," said Maxwell, "that is impossible at the moment. I do not know the terms. You see, I was first to find a potential buyer and then —"

"No trouble whatsoever," said Mr. Marmaduke, "for I have the knowledge that you lack."

"And you will pay the price?"

"Oh, without any question," said the Wheeler. "It will take just a little time. There are certain negotiations which must be terminated. Once those are done, you and I can complete all business and the matter will be done, without any fuss or trouble. The only thing, it would appear to me, is a determination of the commission which you will have earned so richly."

"I would imagine," said Maxwell, bleakly, "that it might be a good commission."

"We had in mind," said Mr. Marmaduke, "naming you — shall we say librarian? — of the commodity we purchase. There will be much work working out the various commodities and codifying them. For work of this sort we will need a creature such as you, and I imagine that you might find the work highly interesting. And the salary — Professor Maxwell, we pray you name the salary and the conditions of employment."

"I would have to think about it."

"By all means," said Mr. Marmaduke. "In a procedure such as this, a little thought is good. You will not find us most disposed to generosity."

"That's not what I meant," said Maxwell. "I'll have to think about the deal. Whether I'd be willing to arrange a sale for you."

"You doubt, perhaps, our worthiness to purchase the commodity?"

"That might be it," said Maxwell.

"Professor Maxwell," said the Wheeler, "it would be advisable for you to lay aside your doubts. It is for the best that you entertain no doubt of us at all. For we are most determined that we shall obtain what you have to offer. So, in the best of grace, you should deal with us."

"Whether I want to or not?" asked Maxwell.

"I," said Mr. Marmaduke, "would have not put it quite so bluntly. But you state it most correctly."

"You are not in the best position," Maxwell told him, "to speak in that tone of voice."

"You are not aware of the position that we hold," the Wheeler said. "Your knowledge goes out to only a certain point in space. You cannot know what lies beyond that point."

There was something in the words, something in the way that they were said, which sent a chill through Maxwell, as if from some unknown quarter of the universe a sharp, frigid blast of wind had blown through the room.

Your knowledge goes only to a certain point in space, Mr. Marmaduke had said, and what lay beyond that point? No one could know, of course, except that in certain areas beyond the shadowy frontier of man's probing it was known the Wheelers had staked out an empire. And seeping across that frontier came horror stories, such tales as any frontier might inspire, stemming from man's wonder concerning that unknown which lay just a little way ahead.

There had been little contact with the Wheelers, and almost nothing was known of them —

and that in itself was bad. There was no thrusting out of hands, no gestures of good will, either from the Wheelers or from the humans and their friends and allies. The frontier lay there, in that one great sector out in space, a silent, sullen line that neither side had crossed.

"I would be better able to come to some decision," Maxwell said, "if my knowledge did extend, if we could know more about you."

"You know that we are bugs," said Mr. Marmaduke, and the words fairly dripped with scorn. "You are intolerant . . ."

"Not intolerant," said Maxwell, angrily, "and we do not think of you as bugs. We know you are what we would call hive mechanisms. We know each of you is a colony of creatures similar to the life forms that here on Earth we think of as insects, and that sets us apart from you, of course, but no more distant from us than many other creatures from many other stars. I do not like the word 'intolerant', Mr. Marmaduke, because it implies that there is ground for tolerance, and there is no such thing — not for you, nor I, nor any other creature in the universe."

He found that he was shaking with his anger and he wondered why he should suddenly become

so angry at a single word. He could remain calm at the thought of the Wheeler buying the knowledge of the crystal planet, then flare with sudden anger at one specific word. Perhaps because, he told himself, with so many different races who must live together, both tolerance and intolerance had become dirty words.

"You argue well and amiably," said Mr. Marmaduke, "and you may not be intolerant —"

"Even were there such a thing as intolerance," said Maxwell, "I cannot understand why you'd resent it so. It would be a reflection upon the one who had exhibited it rather than upon the one toward whom it was directed. Not only a reflection upon good manners, but upon one's basic knowledge. There can be nothing quite so stupid as intolerance."

"Then if not intolerance," asked the Wheeler, "what makes you hesitate?"

"I would have to know how you meant to use the commodity. I would want to know your purpose. I would need to know a great deal more about you."

"So that you could judge?"

"I don't know," said Maxwell, bitterly. "How can one judge a situation such as this?"

"We talk too much," said Mr.

Marmaduke. "And the talk is meaningless. I perceive you have no intention to make a deal with us."

"At the moment," Maxwell told him, "I would say that you were right."

"Then," said Mr. Marmaduke, "we **must** find another way. You will **cause** us, by your refusal, a great deal of time and trouble and we'll be most ungrateful to you."

"I **have** a feeling," Maxwell said, "**that** I can bear up under your ingratitude."

"There is a certain advantage, sir," warned Mr. Marmaduke, "to being **on** the winning side."

Something big and moving swiftly brushed past Maxwell, and out of the corner of his eye he caught the sudden flash of gleaming teeth and the streak of tawny body.

"No, Sylvester!" Maxwell shouted. "Leave him alone, Sylvester!"

Mr. Marmaduke moved swiftly. His wheels blurred as he spun and swept in a quick half circle, skirting Sylvester's rushing charge and heading for the door. Sylvester's claws screeched as he turned, swapping end for end. Maxwell, seeing the Wheeler bearing down upon him, ducked out of the way, but a wheel grazed his shoulder and brushed him roughly to one side. With a

swish, Mr. Marmaduke went streaking out the door. Behind him came Sylvester, long and lithe, a tawny shape that seemed to flow smoothly through the air.

"No, Sylvester!" Maxwell screamed, flinging himself through the door and making a quick turn in the hall, his legs pumping rapidly as he skidded on the turn.

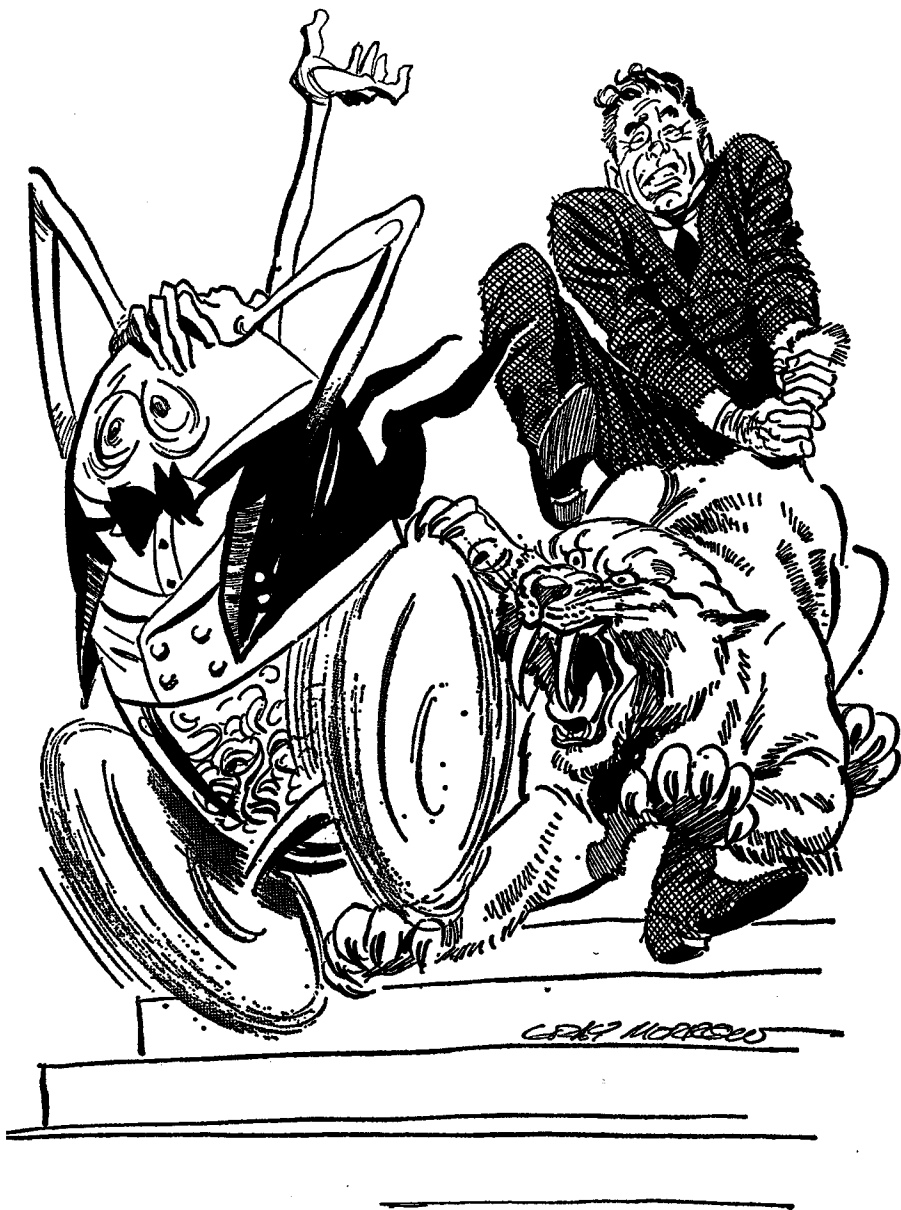
Ahead of him the Wheeler rolling smoothly down the hall, with Sylvester close behind him. Maxwell wasted no more breath in yelling at the cat, but drove his body forward in pursuit.

At the far end of the hall, Mr. Marmaduke swung smoothly to the left; and Sylvester, almost on top of him, lost precious seconds as he fought, and failed, to make as smooth a turn. Warned of the turning in the hall, Maxwell took it in his stride and ahead of him he saw a lighted corridor that led to a short marble staircase and beyond the staircase a crowd of people standing about in little knots, with glasses in their hands.

Mr. Marmaduke was heading for the staircase, going very fast. Sylvester was one leap ahead of Maxwell, perhaps three leaps behind the Wheeler.

XVI

Maxwell tried to yell a warning, but he didn't have the



breath and, in any case, events were moving much too fast at this point.

The Wheeler hit the top step of the staircase, and Maxwell launched his body through the air, arms outstretched. He came down on top of the saber-tooth and wrapped his arms around its neck. The two of them sprawled to the floor; and out of the corner of his eye, as he and Sylvester cartwheeled down the corridor, Maxwell saw the Wheeler bouncing high on the second step and beginning to tip over.

And then, suddenly, there was the screaming of frightened women and the yells of startled men and the crash of breaking glasses. For once, thought Maxwell grimly, Nancy was getting a bigger boot out of her party than she had bargained for.

He piled up against a wall, at the far edge of the staircase. Somehow or other, Sylvester was perched on top of him and reaching down to lap fondly at his face.

"Sylvester," he said, "this was the time you did it. You got us in a mess."

Sylvester went on lapping, and a rasping purr rumbled in his chest.

Maxwell pushed the cat away and managed to slide up the wall to a sitting position.

Out on the floor of the room

beyond the staircase Mr. Mar-maduke lay upon his side, both wheels spinning crazily, the friction of the wheel that was bottom-most making him rotate lopsidedly.

Carol came running up the steps and stopped, with fists firmly on her hips, to stare down at Maxwell and the cat.

"The two of you!" she cried, then choked with anger.

"We're sorry," Maxwell said apologetically.

"The guest of honor," she screamed at them, almost weeping. "The guest of honor and you two hunting him down the halls as if he were a moose."

"Apparently we didn't hurt him much," said Maxwell. "I see he is intact. I wouldn't have been surprised if his belly broke and all those bugs of his were scattered on the floor."

"What will Nancy think?" Carol asked accusingly.

"I imagine," Maxwell told her, "that she'll be delighted. There hasn't been this much ruckus at one of her parties since the time the fire-eating amphibian out of the Nettle system set the Christmas tree on fire."

"You make those things up," said Carol. "I don't believe it happened."

"Cross my heart," said Maxwell. "I was here and saw it. Helped put out the fire."

Out on the floor some of the guests had laid hold of Mr. Marmaduke and were pulling him over to stand upright on his wheels. Little serving robotics were scurrying about, picking up the broken glass and mopping up the floor where the drinks had spilled.

Maxwell got to his feet, and Sylvester moved over close beside him, rubbing against his legs and purring.

Nancy had arrived from somewhere and was talking with Mr. Marmaduke. A large circle of guests stood around and listened to the talk.

"If I were you," suggested Carol, "I'd skin out of here the best way that I could. I can't imagine that you'll be welcome here."

"On the contrary," Maxwell told her. "I'm always welcome here."

He started walking down the staircase, with Sylvester pacing regally beside him. Nancy turned and saw him, broke through the circle and came across the floor to meet him.

"Pete!" she cried. "Then it's really true. You are back again."

"Why, of course," said Maxwell.

"I saw it in the papers, but I didn't quite believe it. I thought it was a hoax or a gag of some sort."

"But you invited me," said Maxwell.

"Invited you?"

She wasn't kidding him. He could see she wasn't kidding.

"You mean you didn't send a Shrimp . . ."

"A Shrimp?"

"Well, a thing that looked like an overgrown shrimp."

She shook her head, and watching her face, Maxwell saw, with something of a shock, that she was growing old. There were many tiny wrinkles around the corners of her eyes that cosmetics failed to hide.

"A thing that looked like a shrimp," he said. "Said it was running errands for you. It said I was invited to the party. It said a car would be sent to fetch me. It even brought me clothes, because it said . . ."

"Pete," said Nancy, "please believe me. I did none of this. I did not invite you. But I'm glad you're here."

She moved closer and laid a hand upon his arm. Her face crinkled in a giggle. "And I'll be interested in hearing about what happened between you and Mr. Marmaduke."

"That I'm sorry about," said Maxwell.

"No need to be. He's my guest, of course, and one must be considerate of guests, but he's a really terrible person. Pete, he's bas-

ically a bore and a snob and”

“Not now,” Maxwell warned her, softly.

Mr. Marmaduke had disengaged himself from the circle of guests and was wheeling across the floor toward them. Nancy turned to face him.

“You’re all right?” she asked. “You really are all right?”

“Very right,” said Mr. Marmaduke.

He wheeled close to Maxwell, and an arm extruded from the top of his roly-poly body — a ropelike, flexible arm more like a tentacle than an arm, with three clawlike fingers on the end of it. He reached out with it and draped it around Maxwell’s shoulders. At the pressure of it, Maxwell had the instinct to shrink away, but with an exercise of conscious will forced himself not to stir.

“I thank you, sir,” said Mr. Marmaduke. “I am most grateful to you. You saved my life, perhaps. Just as I fell I saw you leap upon the beast. It was most heroic.”

Pressed tight against Maxwell’s side, Sylvester lifted his head, dropped his lower jaw, exhibiting his fangs in a silent snarl.

“He would not have hurt you, sir,” said Carol. “He’s as gentle as a kitten. If you had not run, he’d not have chased you. He had the fool idea that you were play-

ing with him. Sylvester likes to play.”

Sylvester yawned, with a fine display of teeth.

“This play,” said Mr. Marmaduke, “I do not care about.”

“When I saw you fall,” said Maxwell, “I was fearful for you. I thought for a moment you would burst wide open.”

“Oh, no need of fear,” said Mr. Marmaduke. “I am extremely resilient. The body is made of excellent material. It is strong and has a bouncing quality.”

He removed his arm from Maxwell’s shoulder, and it ran like an oily rope, writhing in the air, to plop back into his body. There was no mark on the body surface, Maxwell noticed, to indicate where it might have disappeared.

“You’ll excuse me, please,” said Mr. Marmaduke. “There’s someone I must see.” He wheeled about and rolled rapidly away.

Nancy shuddered. “He gives me the creeps,” she said. “Although I must admit he is a great attraction. It isn’t every hostess who can snag a Wheeler. I don’t mind telling you, Pete, that I pulled a lot of wires to get him for a house guest, and now I wish I hadn’t. There’s a slimy feel about him.”

“Do you know why he’d be here — here on Earth, I mean?”

“No, I don’t. I get the impression that he’s a simple tourist.

Although I don't imagine such a creature could be a simple tourist."

"I think you're right," said Maxwell.

"Pete," she said, "tell me about yourself. The papers say"

He grinned. "I know. That I came back from the dead."

"But you didn't, really. I know that's not impossible. Who was that we buried? Everyone, you must understand, simply everyone, was at the funeral, and we all thought it was you. But it couldn't have been you. Whatever could have —"

"Nancy," said Maxwell, "I came back only yesterday. I found that I was dead and that my apartment had been rented and that I had lost my job."

"It seems impossible," said Nancy. "Such things just don't happen. I don't see how this happened."

"I'm not entirely clear about it all myself," Maxwell told her. "Later, I suppose, I'll find out more about it."

"Anyway," said Nancy, "you are here, and everything's all right; and if you don't want to talk about it, I'll circulate the word that you would rather not."

"That's kind of you," said Maxwell, "but it wouldn't work."

"You don't need to worry about newspapermen," said Nan-

cy. "There are no newspaper people here. I used to let them come. A hand-picked few, ones I thought that I could trust. But you can't trust any of them. I found that out the hard way. So you won't be bothered."

"I understand you have a painting"

"You know about the painting, then. Let's go and look at it. It's the proudest thing I have. Imagine it, a Lambert! And one that had dropped entirely out of sight. I'll tell you later how it happened to be found, but I won't tell you what it cost me. I won't tell anyone. I'm ashamed of what it cost me."

"Much or little?"

"Much," said Nancy, "and you have to be so careful. It's so easy to be swindled. I wouldn't even talk of buying it until I had it examined by an expert. In fact, two experts. One to check against the other, although I suppose that was unnecessary."

"But there's no doubt it is a Lambert?"

"No doubt at all. I was almost sure, myself. No one else ever painted quite like Lambert. But he could be copied, of course, and I had to be sure."

"What do you know about Lambert?" Maxwell asked. "Something more than the rest of us? Something that's not found its way into books?"

"No. Really not a great deal. Not about the man himself. Why do you ask?"

"Because you are so excited."

"Well, really! Just finding an unknown Lambert is enough, of course. I have two other paintings of his, but this one is something special because it had been lost. Well, actually I don't know if lost is the word or not. Never known, perhaps, would be better. No record of his ever painting it. No record that survived, at least. And it is one of his so-called grotesques. You would hardly think one of them could be lost or mislaid or whatever happened to it. One of his earlier ones, that might be understandable."

They worked their way across the floor, skirting the little clustered groups of guests.

"Here it is," said Nancy.

They had pushed their way through a crowd that had been grouped in front of the wall on which the painting hung. Maxwell tilted his head to stare up at it.

It was somehow different than the color plates he had seen in the library that morning. This was because, he told himself, of the larger size of the painting, the brilliance and the clarity of color, some of which had been lost in the color plates. But this, he realized, was not all of it.

The landscape was different, and so were the creatures in it. A more Earth-like landscape — the sweep of gray hills and the brown of the shrubby vegetation that lay upon the land, the squatty fern-like trees. A troop of creatures that could be gnomes wended their way across a distant hill; a goblin-like creature sitting at the base of a tree leaned back against the bole, apparently asleep, with some sort of hat pulled down across his eyes. And others — fearsome, leering creatures, with obscene bodies and faces that made the blood run cold.

On the crest of a distant, flat-topped hill, about the base of which clustered a large crowd of many kinds of creatures, a small black blob stood outlined against the grayness of the sky.

Maxwell drew in his breath in a startled gasp, took a quick step closer, then halted and stood stiff and straight, afraid to give himself away.

It seemed impossible that no one else could have noticed it, he told himself. Although, perhaps, someone had but had not thought it worth the mention.

But for Maxwell there could be no doubt. He was sure of what he saw. That small black blob on the distant hilltop was the Artifact!

TO BE CONCLUDED

THE RICHES OF EMBARRASSMENT

by H. L. GOLD



*She wasn't exactly an accident-prone.
Her worst effects were all on others!*

The Costellos, two great little people well under five feet tall, had moved out of the one-bedroom apartment to the left of mine, and my neighbors and I wondered apprehensively who would move in. I know it's true that you can live in a Manhattan apartment house all your life and never know your neighbors, but the tenth floor of our building was lively proof that this needn't be so, and we wanted it to continue.

Dick and Charlotte Fort (two bedrooms, to right of my apartment) were airily positive that we would assimilate whoever it might be. The Masons (three

bedrooms, across the hall) could use another cheery sitter for their manic kids, for the Costellos had always been happy to oblige. Betty Snowden (one bedroom, left of the Masons) hoped the new tenant(s?) would like Maxwell, her big, but *big*, cat. Being closest to the vacant apartment, I wished for somebody quiet who wouldn't mind my typing late and might welcome an occasional visit, as everybody on the tenth floor did.

After the painters were finished, two men put down green wall-to-wall carpeting. Furniture was brought in. On the door under the peep-hole appeared an in-

scrutable nameplate: J. McGivney. Bachelor? Divorcee? Couple? The name gave us no clue.

It happened to be my lot to find out. And the way I found out was this: I had just come up with the mail and was about to close the door when I noticed that the damnable top screw of my lock had worked its way loose again. So I was standing with the door half open and turning the screw with my thumbnail and the elevator came up to the tenth floor. A perfectly ordinary-seeming woman in her forties emerged and headed toward me, key in hand.

"Hello," I said brightly, introducing myself. "And you're Mrs. McGivney?"

"Miss," she said flatly, looking at what I was doing.

It did look pretty silly, and I found myself babbling, "The top screw keeps coming out, and I keep having to screw it back in. Doesn't yours?"

"I don't know what you mean," she said and unlocked her door and went in, followed by the sound of doublelocking and chaining it.

When I reported this to the Forts, they laughed me out of my embarrassment and said they would thaw her out. They put a couple of bottles of wine and some glasses on a tray and invited me to come along and see. Out in

the hall, they rang Miss McGivney's bell. The peephole opened, and an eye stared at us.

"We're the Welcome Wagon!" cried Charlotte Fort gaily.

"I didn't order any," said Miss McGivney, closing the peephole.

The Forts stood there for a long moment before soberly going back to their apartment, and I went into mine. We didn't think of drinking the wine ourselves.

So far, this doesn't sound like the start of a remarkable scientific discovery, but it was, requiring only time and more data. It was Charlotte's destiny to add the next item.

"I never go out to the incinerator," she chattered later. "That's Dick's job. But we had the people from the office over, and he went to bed feeling sick, and I couldn't face all the empty bottles that had accumulated." She shuddered. "So there I was in the middle of the night, clutching liquor bottles, and guess who came out."

"Miss McGivney?" I supplied.

She nodded. "I was pretty high myself, but not after she watched me struggle to put the empties down the incinerator. I crept into bed, positively ill with embarrassment, and tried to wake Dick, but no soap."

"That's ridiculous," said Dick heartily. "What's more natural

than dumping a few bottles down the incinerator at two in the morning?"

"Fifteen," said Charlotte. "And it was four-thirty."

Dick, the Masons and I laughed her out of it, of course. Only I knew how she felt; the others hadn't met Miss McGivney yet.

Sometime that summer, the Masons boys came home from camp for the weekend on their way to a dude ranch. Let Mrs. Mason tell it:

"Mike had brought back a snake from camp. It was a pretty little one; but he couldn't keep it, obviously, and I told him to take it to the ranch and let it go. A few hours after they left, the police and firemen charged out of the elevators and made for Miss McGivney's apartment, clubs and axes at the ready. When they came out, I asked what had happened. A snake, they told me, had wound up in her bathtub!"

"And for that she called the police and fire department?" asked Dick Fort, stunned.

"Not only that," said Mrs. Mason, "she scrubbed every inch of the place on her hands and knees!"

"But why?" asked Mr. Mason.

"To kill any eggs it may have laid. I know it's biological nonsense, but the poor woman was hysterical."

The Masons were visited by

executives from the management office, who made it clear that Mrs. Mason should not have confessed so readily, and the item made the local newspaper. We laughed them out of their embarrassment, but we noticed that it was getting harder and harder to do and also that we never seemed to meet Miss McGivney except under embarrassing conditions. Only Dick Fort and Betty Snowden disagreed. They said we were getting a bit paranoid.

You might say it was Betty's turn next, though not in person. Her sixteen-year-old niece from Ohio was visiting her — sleeping on the sofa because Betty, if you remember, had only one bedroom — and the girl got up early and, in her shortie nightgown, went out into the hall to get the *Sunday Times* that Betty had delivered to her, when the door blew shut behind the girl. She rang the bell and banged on the door, but Betty had the bedroom door closed and flents in her ears, a longtime practice. So her niece philosophically sat down on the welcome mat and started looking at the ads. That was when Miss McGivney came out on her way to early Mass.

The girl smiled up at her as she waited for the elevator and tried to explain what had happened to her.

"I don't recall asking," said Miss McGivney, and took the elevator.

"Damn it," I said when Betty finished, "is it us or what? These are the kind of things that happen once in years to anybody, yet she walks right into them every time!"

"It's your own fault," said Dick. "If you'd used a screwdriver instead of your thumbnail, or you, Charlotte, could have waited for me to get rid of the bottles the next day, or your niece, Betty, might have turned the lock before going after the paper —"

"But why does Miss McGivney always come along at just the wrong moment?" argued Mrs. Mason.

"Pure happenstance," said Dick. "And not thinking ahead."

"That's because you haven't had her walk in on you like we have," said Charlotte, too annoyed to watch her English.

"And she never will," Dick said. "I think before I act."

If life were dramatically logical, he should have been the next victim, but he wasn't. I was. The Forts had invited me to dinner, but let me finish my day's work instead of joining their company for cocktails. Finished, I phoned to beg off, being so tired that I needed a nap. As always, Charlotte was gracious about it, and

I lay down with a good conscience.

It was dark when I awoke, long past the Forts' dinnertime. I took a shower, dressed and went toward the kitchen to open some cans and eat standing up. But a slip of paper on the floor near the front door seemed to have Charlotte's handwriting on it. I picked it up and read: "Look outside before you ha-ha make dinner for yourself. Then come on in and join us."

I opened the door. Out in the hall, directly in front of my door, was a collection of plates containing uncooked spaghetti, Charlotte's famous meat balls and meat sauce, salad and dressing, Italian bread, and shrimp cocktail and dessert. Just as I bent over to take them in, Miss McGivney's door opened. I straightened and said hello, determined not to offer any explanation.

Looking at the things on the floor, she said, "Some sort of ritual?"

My nerve broke, and I was blathering away when the elevator saved me from further embarrassment. After morosely eating, I went next door, downed two highballs, and told Dick and Charlotte what had transpired.

Dick shouted, "Listen to this, people!" and uproariously repeated my story. It took me a long time to forgive him. As a

matter of fact, it wasn't until he met Miss McGivney face to face for the first time; he left for work before she did and came home earlier, so they just hadn't crossed paths.

This fateful morning, Dick had overslept. He threw on his clothes, yelling to Charlotte that he didn't have time for breakfast; and was waiting for the elevator when he noticed that his zipper was open. He gave it a yank — and snagged his boxer shorts.

Need I tell you who appeared at that very instant?

Much stuff has flowed under the thing since then, including Miss McGivney and the Masons and me moving away, and Betty's cat died, so she took a sabbatical without feeling guilty, and though I still correspond with the Forts, we've stopped debating Miss McGivney and our awful moments. It's all very clear, at least to me.

As I said earlier, she led to a remarkable scientific discovery, and so she did. In years of ceaseless research, I have never found any discussion, much less theory, concerning the power that Miss McGivney clearly possessed. This

can therefore be counted a First. Here it is:

Using a previously unknown and unsuspected ESP faculty of the mind, Miss McGivney unconsciously manufactured embarrassing incidents.

We on the tenth floor weren't so much victims as puppets. That was bad enough — but can you imagine what life would be like if you had her power? Wherever you entered or exited, somebody would inevitably be doing something that you much preferred not to witness, let alone have explained unconvincingly to you. If you were devout, like her, thoughts in the form of prayers like these might race through your mind as you steel yourself to go out each morning: "Dear Lord, don't let me see anything upsetting today! Save me from disgusting sights! Make people act like people instead of animals!"

And, naturally, these thoughts would create what you are praying not to occur, and the harder you pray, the more inevitable they become.

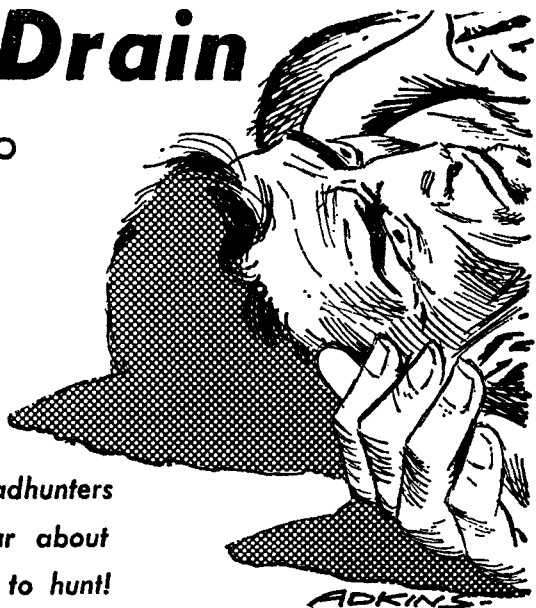
Poor Miss McGivney! Poor world of Miss McGivney!

— H. L. GOLD

August 29-Sept. 2, 1968, BAYCON: 26th World Science Fiction Convention. At Hotel Claremont, Oakland, California. Philip José Farmer, Guest of Honor. More details later. For information: BAYCON, P.O. Box 261 Fairmont Station, El Cerrito, Calif. 94530. Membership: \$1.00 foreign, \$2.00 supporting, \$3.00 attending. Join now and receive Progress Reports.

Brain Drain

by JOSEPH P. MARTINO



*We're the modern headhunters
— and very particular about
whose heads we want to hunt!*

I

It was a beautiful day. The sky was clear and had that dark blue color you usually see only in advertisements for summer resorts. The sun was pleasantly warm, and the breeze on my face was pleasantly cool. After six months of sweltering down on the Bangkok Plain, this was sheer heaven. I leaned back in the saddle of my Suzuki motor scooter and breathed deeply.

But let me introduce myself. I'm Tom Harrison, and I work for Intelligence Imports Incorporated. A year ago Triple-I pulled me out of Nigeria, where I had been working for over two years, put me through a crash course in

Thai and sent me to Bangkok. I spent the next six months sloshing around in the paddy fields between Bangkok and Lopburi, looking for bright young kids who could be recruited to go to work in the States. Not to mention swatting mosquitoes and getting rained on. Then the Company decided that area was pretty well worked out and sent me up-country, to the Korat Plateau. It's only about a hundred and sixty miles from Bangkok, but the thousand feet of altitude makes all the difference in the world.

I don't mind being shifted around like that, either. In fact, I like traveling. The only reason I resigned from the Special Forc-

es after five years was that they kept sending me to some pretty unfriendly places. But the places Triple-I sends me to are reasonably friendly. Miserable, maybe, but friendly.

So when they send me to a nice place like this, I make a point of enjoying it, and this was a place I could enjoy. The hills were steep and covered with green. The valley floors were covered with little stands of hardwood trees, alternating with fields of corn, almost ready for harvesting. I told myself if it weren't for the occasional thatched huts, and the banana trees in the foreground, this place could easily be mistaken for eastern Pennsylvania, around Susquehanna County. It was enough to make me homesick.

But my Suzuki suddenly yanked me back to Thailand, as the front wheel dropped into a chuck-hole and nearly pitched me out of the saddle. I recovered quickly and started paying more attention to the road. It was really nothing more than two parallel ruts made by hundreds of ox-carts over dozens of years. Two days ago I'd left Korat, the provincial capital, and followed a paved road north to Non Tai, which is the equivalent of the County Seat. I'd spent the night there, then struck out across country by cart track, towards

my destination, the village of Song Hong.

After a few more miles, the thatched huts started getting closer together, and I figured I must be getting close to Song Hong. As I rode into a stand of trees, two stray dogs lying beside the road got up and barked at me. That was a pretty good sign the village was close. But the clincher came a hundred yards or so farther along. A cluster of small boys, too young to be in school, and stark naked except for T-shirts, started yelling "*far-ang, farang*" and followed me down the road. Sure enough, as I came out of the trees, there was the village.

Song Hong means, literally, two rooms. But evidently the village had grown some since it had been named. There **must** have been a couple of hundred people living in it. The main street was winding and crooked, as though it had originally been a cow-path, but it was wide enough for two ox-carts and was covered with gravel, so it would be usable even in the wet season. Along both sides of the street there were one- and two-story thatched huts, looking well built and in good repair. About halfway through the village was a wooden frame building, surrounded by a fence of bamboo poles. It was evidently

used as the town hall and police station, judging by the Thai flag flying from a pole in the courtyard. And off through the trees I could make out the orange and green tile roof of a Buddhist temple.

I pulled off to the side of the street and dragged a map out of my saddlebag. I found the school on the map, about half a mile beyond the village. According to the records I'd examined in Non Tai, the school served a fairly large district. It had all twelve grades and almost five hundred students. I looked at my watch and decided that since it was just past noon, I'd eat lunch before I went to the school.

By this time almost a dozen kids had gathered around me, just standing there silently and staring. I picked the biggest and asked him, in Thai, where the restaurant was located. He blinked at me, startled, then managed to get out that it was that way and around the corner. I guess he didn't expect a *farang* to speak Thai. As I started the scooter, the kids stepped aside to let me through, and I rode off. I spotted the restaurant with no trouble. I didn't even need to read the sign out front. Almost invariably, in these small villages, the restaurant is in a two-story building. The proprietor lives upstairs, and the downstairs is one

big room, usually with at least one side completely open. This one was located on a corner of two streets, and there were two sides open. I parked my scooter out front, ducked to get my six-foot-six frame under the bamboo ceiling and sat down at the nearest table. The chair was too small for me, and my feet stuck out on the other side of the table, but by now I was used to that.

There was a hand-written menu on the table, much battered and spotted, but still readable. I spotted fried noodles on the menu and was about to order them when I checked the price and thought about my expense account. A dish of fried noodles went for ten baht, which is about fifty cents U.S. But Triple-I knows it doesn't cost much to live out in the boondocks, and my expense account goes down accordingly. They're a very cost-conscious outfit. So I settled for fried rice, for only five baht. By comparison with prices in the States, I consider these prices quite reasonable. But I've been told that they were much lower yet back in the late Sixties, before the Air Force moved into the Base at Korat and drove the prices up.

The proprietor came up and spoke to me in broken English. When I answered him in

Thai, he just beamed. Thailand doesn't have any colonial history, so most of the people are friendly to Westerners anyway. But they really go overboard for a Westerner who's taken the trouble to learn their language. I know that some of our competitors, like Brainpower Unlimited, don't believe in giving language training to their fieldmen. They claim that the time lost in retraining a man every time he moves to another country costs more than an interpreter. They may well be right. In this business, you have to be very cost-conscious. But Triple-I is as cost-conscious as the rest of them, if not more so, and still insists on language training. I'm in full agreement. Things go much more smoothly if you don't have to work through an interpreter. And I think it pays off for Triple-I, too. On the average, our fieldmen locate half again as many recruits as our competition.

While I waited for my rice, I pulled out the photocopies I'd made of the school records in Non Tai. Here again, I felt, was one more advantage of not having to use an interpreter. I could read Thai well enough to search the records in the branch office of the Ministry of Education by myself. And instead of just looking for grades, I could base my judgments on the other informa-

tion I found in the files as well.

According to what I'd found, Manob Suravit, who was in his last year at the Song Hong high school, was a very hot prospect. It wasn't just his grades, which were good but not all that outstanding. It was the whole pattern of his activities which caught my eye. I couldn't tell you what made him stand out from the others, but I've found that since coming to work for Triple-I, I've developed a sort of sixth sense that's rarely wrong in judging students.

My meal finally came, a big platter of fried rice, covered with onion greens, and accompanied by a pot of hot black tea. I put Manob's records back in my pocket and looked around me. I suddenly noticed that I was surrounded by a ring of small children, all staring solemnly at me.

By now I was used to this sort of thing, though. They don't often see Westerners, and the white skin fascinates them. (A "*farang*," incidentally, is a Thai fruit with a white interior pulp.) And watching a Westerner eat is even more fascinating. But I figured I'd fool them. By now I could eat with chopsticks as well as with fork and spoon. I pulled the plate to me, pushed aside the onions (no sense risking a digestive disturbance from uncooked vegetables), and put some hot

sauce on the rice. That got another smile out of the proprietor. The Thais are very fond of hot sauces, but most Westerners never get past the burning and crying stage. Then I picked up my chopsticks and set to work. That ring of dark brown eyes followed my every move. Finally one of the kids spoke up.

"*Farang* come two days ago. You know him?"

II

I dropped my chopsticks. A Westerner here recently? Someone from Brainpower? Or one of the other outfits? I asked him for more information, but he couldn't give any. Nor could the proprietor. I learned only that two days ago a *farang* had come through the village, talked to a few people, eaten at the restaurant, and gone. Was he accompanied by an interpreter? No, he wasn't. That was some help, but not much. There was nothing to stop Brainpower, or any other of the outfits, from hiring someone who already knew Thai. Just as Triple-I had hired me, in part, because I'd learned Swahili in the Special Forces.

I started to get up, then sat back down. If Brainpower had already sewed up Manob, there was nothing I could do about it. And if they hadn't, then there

was no point in getting excited. So I finished my meal without hurrying, even though I was nagged by the question of whether I'd made this trip in vain.

I pulled out some money to pay the bill and left the proprietor as big a tip as I thought my expense account could afford. Then I checked with him to make sure I had the right directions to the school and set out again on my mission.

The school, too, was completely typical. The floor was up on stilts, so the kids could play under the building when it rained. The one floor held all the classrooms, which were separated by partitions.

All around the outside was a balcony and a railing. I went up the stairs and around the balcony to the schoolmaster's office. I ducked my head to get through the doorway and went in. The schoolmaster was at his desk.

I put my hands with the palms together, fingers straight and held just under my chin, bobbed my head and said "*Sawatdi*," which can best be translated as "Good luck to you" and is used for good morning, good evening, good-bye and just about everything else. The schoolmaster rose and returned my greeting. We exchanged some pleasantries, and he complimented me on my Thai.

GALAXY

Then I pulled out my authorization from the Ministry of Education to do educational recruiting (in the trade we call it a "headhunting permit") and I showed it to him. He froze up immediately.

That surprised me. In Nigeria I was used to having the village Communist denounce me as an agent of imperialism. But in Thailand I very rarely met anything this unfriendly. But there was no help for it. I had to go ahead.

"I would like to see Mr. Manob Suravit."

"He is not here." That was chilling. Maybe Brainpower had been here before me.

"Has he been recruited by someone else?"

"I do not know."

"Where is he?"

"I do not know."

Oh, he was a cool one, the schoolmaster was. He wasn't going to defy me, since I could complain to the Ministry of Education and cause him a lot of trouble. But he wasn't going to help me either.

"I wish to inspect Mr. Manob's records." They would have to show whether he'd been recruited or not.

"There is no one to help you find them."

"Help is not needed. I can read Thai."

BRAIN DRAIN

That got him. He couldn't refuse to let me look at the records. But they were no help, except to show that the boy had missed school three days in a row. But the additional information in them, which hadn't been sent on to Non Tai, made me even more certain I wanted to sign him up.

I turned back to the schoolmaster. "Can you tell me where he lives?"

"I do not know."

He was taking a risk with that statement. I felt sure he knew where one of his best students lived. If I could prove he was lying, I could put enough pressure on the Ministry to make him sorry for it. But it wasn't worth the trouble, and he probably knew that. So I copied down the name of Manob's father and took my leave of the schoolmaster. He didn't reply to my polite farewell.

I went back into Song Hong, to the police station, and inquired if they knew where Mr. Sakul Suravit lived. They searched the register and gave me directions. It was off the main cart track, a total of about five miles. Manob must have used a bicycle to get to and from school. It took me about an hour to find the place, and I nearly shook my teeth out on the last half mile of rough trail, before I got off my scooter and pushed it.

Finally I reached the Suravit home. It was a three-room thatched house, up on stilts, with some pigs and chickens under the house, avoiding the sun. There was a low fence around the house, probably to keep the chickens out of the fields. I wheeled my scooter through the gate and stopped. I didn't have to wonder what to do next. A young man came down the ladder from the house and walked to meet me. I saw that he was wearing clean khaki shirt and pants, and a pair of Japanese rubber sandals.

"*Sawatdi*. I wish to see Mr. Manob Suravit."

"Good afternoon, sir. I am Manob Suravit," he answered in slightly accented English. "What can I do for you?"

"Is your father home, or your mother?" I asked.

"My mother is sick, and I am staying home from school to care for the younger children while my father works in his fields. He is not here now, but will be home later."

"I would like to talk to them about you going to college, then working in America." And I handed him my headhunting permit.

He looked at the document, then nodded his head slowly. "The *farang* who was here two

days ago had a paper like this one," he said. "But he was from Brainpower Unlimited. He tried to get my father to sign his paper, but my father wanted to think about it. He told the man to come back the next day, but he did not. I have not seen him since."

"Do you still have his paper?"

"He took it with him. However, I did read it, and I also read it to my father. My father went to school only two years, and does not read well. But," he added proudly, "he is a very good farmer and takes the advice of the man from the Ministry of Agriculture."

"Very well," I told him, "then you know what I want. When your father returns I will talk to him about signing my paper. But first I would like you to take some tests."

This was the key to whether I would offer to recruit him. Grades weren't always reliable, since the quality of school systems varied. And Triple-I wasn't about to invest big money in someone just on the basis of my hunches about him. They insisted that he be given their tests, to determine his ability and potential. So I unpacked my saddlebags and brought out the test materials.

Triple-I had spent a lot of money on the development of

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these tests. They were so far beyond the old IQ tests as to make comparisons ridiculous. They tested ability to learn, creativity, ability to make and use abstractions, mechanical ability and all kinds of other things. And the beauty of it was that they were completely culture-free. They didn't depend on reading skills peculiar to middle-class American suburbia. I had used the same set of materials in Nigeria, and they would be equally useful in Westchester County or Harlem.

The boy took three hours to finish, including a few interruptions to make some tea for his mother, to dust off a baby sister who'd fallen down, and a few other things. But when he was finished, I saw that my intuition had been right. He was one of the best I'd ever tested. He was no Einstein, but he was in the top one or two per cent of the human race. Triple-I just *had* to have him. We could get a placement bonus of at least fifteen thousand, over and above expenses, once his education was complete.

Just then the boy's father arrived. I introduced myself, we chatted pleasantly for a while and then we got down to business. He suggested that we go inside, so his wife could take part in the discussions too. So the

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three of us sat around a table, drinking tea.

"Let me explain what I offer," I started. "Your son is a very clever boy. He should go to the University after he has finished high school. We will pay his tuition and give him a living allowance while he is in school. He will go to Chulalongkorn University, in Bangkok, until his education is completed. Then he will go to America. In America, he will make enough money to live well, and to pay us back for his education. And even to send some home to you." I always added that last statement. It usually helped convince people, and in most cases the recruits actually did send remittances home.

The mother spoke up quickly. "But that means he will go away from our home. We will not see him." From her standpoint, this was a strong objection. Thai family bonds are strong.

"At first he will not go far," I answered. "He will go to Chulalongkorn for seven years. That is only a few hours ride by train from Korat. On holidays he can come home to see you."

"The train costs money," the father objected.

"True," I replied, "but the living allowance we give him will include enough money for train fares." That was strictly true, but since the boy would have to pay

back every penny of it, with interest, it was our experience that he would make fewer and fewer visits home as time went on.

"But then he will go to America. That is too far away," the mother interjected.

"Even when he goes to America," I continued, "any time he wants to, he can fly back to Don Muang Airport, at Bangkok, and then take the train to see you." That, too, was strictly true. He would have just as much opportunity to travel as any other American citizen. But even tourist class fares on the Jumbo jets were enough to discourage his coming home very often. But I saw no point in mentioning that.

"But I need the boy to help me in the fields after he finishes high school," the father added. "I have other children to feed and to buy clothes for. If he goes there will be no one to help me."

"Surely," I said, as smoothly as I could, "you wouldn't let that stand in the way of your boy getting an education and bettering himself."

"Of course not," the father replied. "What kind of a father do you think I am? It is just that I will have to hire a man to help me if he goes."

Well, I thought, now we know what kind of a father you are. We're just haggling over the

price. "How much will a hired man cost?"

"About two hundred baht a month."

I thought for a moment. According to what I had read, that was a bit high for the price of farm labor, but not much. It came to about ten dollars a month, US currency. "That is for a fully experienced farmer. To hire a boy about your son's age will cost only about one hundred fifty baht a month. And how many years will you need to keep hiring someone?"

"My youngest daughter is five. I will need to hire farm help until she has finished school."

That was robbery, and I wasn't about to hold still for it. "Does Manob have an older brother?" I knew he did, from the school records.

"Yes, he does."

"Where is he?"

"He lives with his wife, on the other side of Song Hong."

"How old was he when he was married?"

"He was twenty two." That checked with the records the police had shown me.

"Very well, I offer to pay you one hundred fifty baht a month, to hire a man to take Manob's place, until Manob is twenty two."

"Manob will need clothes to go away to school," the mother

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spoke up. "He cannot wear the clothes he has now."

"Yes," the father added, "the other man offered us two thousand baht to buy clothes for Manob."

I had wondered how soon I'd have to start outbidding Brainpower. Apparently the business of hiring a helper was something the father thought of only after the Brainpower field man had left. I decided to be a bit stubborn, just to let them know I wasn't getting involved in an auction with Brainpower.

"The other man did not come back, did he? Perhaps you would rather wait for him and his two thousand baht?" Actually, that was almost pure bluff. I had no intention of walking out of there without a signed contract, if I could possibly help it, no matter what I had to offer. However, it worked.

"Well, perhaps he could get by on fewer clothes. How about one thousand baht?" That from the boy's father.

"No. I will not go above five hundred baht." Now that I had the boy's father on the run, I was going to keep him that way if I could.

We haggled some more, about the living allowance, train fares, postage for letters home and lots of other things. Thais

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learn to haggle shortly after they learn to talk, and they love to do it.

After about an hour we ran out of things to haggle about.

"Very well," I said, "are we agreed on these terms?" Manob read back to his father what I'd written into the contract. Both the parents finally agreed to every word.

"Fine. Now here is the contract. You, as the boy's father, sign here. The boy will sign over here."

After that, I left as soon as I could, with my copy of the contract safely in my pocket. I'd have to go by the school, to enter the contract on the boy's records. Then I'd have to get back to Non Tai as quickly as possible and register the contract with the Ministry of Education. Then I'd mail the contract back to the home office and get busy tracking down some more prospects. I walked the scooter back towards the main road until the track was smooth enough to consider riding on. By then the sun was almost setting, so I hurried as fast as I could. It looked as though I'd have to spend the night in Song Hong.

I rode through a grove of trees at near top speed. There were long shadows across the road, and I didn't see the wire until just before I hit it.

If I had been just a few inches shorter, it would have broken my neck. As it was, it caught me high on my chest and spilled me off my scooter. I relaxed as I went over the back of the saddle, and while the fall knocked the wind out of me, nothing got broken. I lay there in the road on my back, a ring of pain around me just below my ribs. I tried to breathe in. Nothing. I tried to cough. Again nothing. I tried to squeeze my chest. Still nothing. Out of the corner of my eye I saw half a dozen men, waving clubs, run out of the trees. I heaved myself up on my elbows and worked my feet around towards them. Again I tried to suck in some air, and with the feeling that I'd broken through some kind of barrier, my chest muscles started working again. I coughed and sucked in another lungful.

I craned my head up and took a look at the cluster of men standing a few feet away. They looked like big, husky farm boys. Probably the biggest in the village. If I had been standing up, the tallest might have come to my shoulder. But although they were tough-looking, they didn't seem to know how to work together.

Now that I could breathe again, I wasn't worried. I hadn't spent

five years in the Special Forces without learning how to take care of myself. As long as I could take them on one at a time, I figured I'd come out on top.

They started to move up to me. I raised my knees slightly, and drew my feet back. As one of them came closer, I hooked my left foot behind his right leg. I slammed his right knee with the heel of my boot. But not too hard. I wasn't interested in doing him any permanent damage. I just wanted him out of the fight for a while. He went over backwards, and I rolled aside to avoid a kick from another one of them. I bounced to my feet and scooped up the club my first victim had dropped. As one ran behind me I stepped forward, swung at another to discourage him from getting too close and turned around. The one who'd been behind me swung his club, but I was out of range. I stepped in and gave him a backhand swipe with my club as he went by. Two down. I turned again, and the rest started to circle around me. I stepped toward one of them. He swung while I was still out of reach, then turned and ran. The other four followed him into the trees.

I didn't follow them. Twilight in the tropics is very short, and in a few minutes it was going to be pitch black. Besides, I had nothing to gain from either beat-

ing them up or turning them in.

I righted my scooter, then stood and thought for a minute. Finally it hit me.

The schoolmaster. This had to be his work. No one else knew for sure where I was except the police, and they wouldn't have to go to this kind of subterfuge if they wanted to get rid of me. And it explained why the man from Brainpower hadn't come back. He'd been scared off, or perhaps killed. Maybe I ought to be grateful to the schoolmaster for driving him off, so Triple-I could sew up Manob, but I didn't think it was a good idea to encourage attacks on fieldmen.

So I had a couple of score to settle with the schoolmaster.

He was still in his office, which was the only lighted room in the school building. I didn't worry about him having anyone else around there. He was probably expecting his bully-boys to come back for their payoff, and he certainly wouldn't want any witnesses to that.

I stepped into his office and greeted him politely. "Sawatdi," I said. "I met some friends of yours on the way over here, and I thought you'd like to know what happened to them. Two of them were still lying in the road when I left, and the rest were running into the woods."

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He remained seated at his desk and stared at me with hate-filled eyes. Finally he spoke. "The other man was smart enough not to come back. If you come back again I will see that you don't leave, if I have to kill you myself."

I sat down and spoke as mildly as I could. "I'm glad to hear the man representing Brainpower Unlimited was not killed. If he had been, I would not rest until the Thai courts punished you for it. But since he's still alive, he can take whatever action he wishes to. Since I hurt your men worse than they hurt me, I bear no grudges. But would you mind telling me why you did it?"

"You are leeches," he grated out. "With this brain drain, you take away our brightest young people, the ones we need most for our future leaders."

"But," I replied, "the Ministry of Education has approved our work. Do you think they would approve something which was harmful to Thailand?"

"Bah!" he snorted. "Thailand has had corrupt governments in the past. I would not find it hard to believe that you have corrupted this one, too."

"All right, so approval by the Ministry doesn't impress you. Then would you tell me specifically who we're hurting, and how?"

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"You hurt the men and women themselves. You sell them into slavery."

"What do you mean, slavery? I don't think the average scientist or doctor in America is living in slavery. All we do is lend our recruits enough money to pay for their education. We're a private, profit-making corporation, and we expect them to pay us back. I don't call that slavery, either."

"But it's not just the cost of his education that you make him pay back. He has living expenses to pay back, too. You allow him to live in a very high style, much better than he would live at home, to induce him to leave home. You bribe him. And you bribe his parents, too, with all kinds of payments. And the worst of it is that he has to pay you back for the bribe money."

IV

I leaned forward and stuck my finger out at him. "Now you just wait a minute. Let's be realistic. Take this young man, Manob. Could he have gone to college without our help?"

"No, of course not. His parents cannot send him. He took the scholarship exams and did well, but not well enough. There are just not enough scholarships, even for those who are qualified."

"Right," I said. "Without our

help, he'd spend the rest of his life on the farm. Now to complete his education, including living costs, tuition, and what we pay his parents, will amount to about five thousand dollars in US money. When he's employed in America, he'll make at least twice that much a year. Our contract calls for him to pay back the loan, with interest, over a period of ten years. It'll cost him under a thousand a year, including interest charges. That's less than ten per cent of his salary. That sure beats running a farm out here in the boondocks."

He was silent for a moment. Then he spoke again. "Very well. Perhaps the boy does benefit. But how about Thailand? You are stealing our educated young men and women, men and women we will need as our country develops. Every year Chulalongkorn graduates a hundred Ph.D.'s. But only twenty-five of those stay in Thailand. The rest go to America. You are taking college graduates from a country which has few of them and sending them to a country which has many already."

I leaned back and sighed. This man was a hard nut to crack. "Okay, let's look at the facts. It's true we have more Ph.D.'s per capita in the US than you do in Thailand. But we still don't have enough to fill our demand. So

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we import them from you. But you're not losing anything in the process. Educating our recruits won't cost Thailand a single baht. We pay Chulalongkorn University not only the normal tuition and fees for the students we put through there, but the full audited cost, plus a bonus. The University actually makes a profit on the students we send through, a profit which they can use to help make up their losses on their regular students."

"That may be true," he answered, "but we still have to maintain a University big enough for one hundred graduate students, just to get twenty-five a year for ourselves."

"But you've missed the whole point," I protested. "Because of the large number of students put through by the various headhunting outfits, Chulalongkorn can take advantage of economies of scale. Administrative overhead can be spread over more students. And since you need more faculty members anyway, they can afford to specialize. One professor can teach three sections of the same course, instead of teaching three different courses. You have a better faculty than you would in a smaller school, and the students you will employ domestically are getting a better education than they would in a small school."

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The schoolmaster seemed to have calmed down somewhat. The hatred and anger were gone. He still wasn't convinced, but he was arguing rationally. "Despite all you say," he said, "these are still people we need in Thailand. And you're taking them away."

"No, I disagree," I replied. "You can't say we're taking people you need domestically. You're already training as many Ph.D.'s for domestic use as you can find jobs for. Or if you're not, the answer is to provide more scholarships for deserving students. But don't criticize us for importing into the US some Ph.D.'s who would have stayed on the farm if it hadn't been for our help."

"Look," I went on, "picture it this way. What's the ideal industry for an underdeveloped country? One which calls for high labor input, low capital input, and low land input, right?"

He nodded, slowly. I could see I was finally getting through. "Well," I added, "that describes a University perfectly. About 80% of Chulalongkorn's costs are pay of faculty and staff. The capital investment per student is small, and no raw materials are required. Producing Ph.D.'s for export, if managed properly, can be a very profitable enterprise for an underdeveloped country. And I think your Ministry of Education is seeing that it's man-

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aged properly. You don't object to the export of oranges, or of corn. Both are big moneymakers for Thailand. Why do you object to raising Ph.D.'s for export?"

The schoolmaster answered me in an almost friendly tone. "You have pointed to the big problem," he said. "If we export oranges, the tree is still here to grow more. If we export corn, we keep some seed corn for the next crop. But men and women capable of earning Ph.D.'s are not grown like oranges or corn. They happen by chance. And when we export them to America, their children are born in America. Exporting Ph.D.'s lowers the average intelligence of the next generation."

I replied slowly. "What you say is true, as far as it goes. However, look at the numbers. In Thailand this year there are about 800,000 eighteen-year-olds. We are interested in the top ten per cent of these, or about 80,000. Of these, we take less than a hundred. You lose more than that to fatal diseases and accidents. The genetic damage we do to Thailand by importing Ph.D.'s from you is negligible. And if you were really worried about it, you could make up for it by providing some incentives for your domestically employed Ph.D.'s to have more children."

"I have to admit the force of

your arguments," he finally answered. "Neither your recruits, nor Thailand, is hurt by your importing of Ph.D.'s. But why should we help you?"

"Why, you benefit economically. The benefits are already considerable. And the projections of the Ministry of Education show that in a decade, the export of Ph.D.'s will be your sixth largest source of foreign exchange. You ought to be cooperating with the program, instead of fighting it."

He looked thoughtful. "You are right," he said. "I've been making a mistake. I'll keep you in mind as a source of scholarships for my bright students who can't find a way to go to college."

"Fine," I said. "And we'll even give you a bonus for every recruit you get for us. And don't worry about it costing the student anything," I added as his face started to cloud up. "It will cost the student less than if we'd had to go to the usual expense of having a fieldman recruit him. You'll be doing a favor to all concerned, including yourself. Now if you'll excuse me," I said as I stood up, "I must find a place to stay tonight. I have a long way to go tomorrow, and more work to do."

He stood up and returned my farewell with a vigorous nod of his head. I left him sitting at his desk, wearing a smile on his face.

— JOSEPH P. MARTINO

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SWORD GAME



by H. H. HOLLIS

Problem in topology: Find the shape which best holds a girl you no longer want!

Late in the afternoon of an ugly fall day, a forty-year-old topologist, employed to teach mathematics at a university he despised, bored by his students and frightened that he had done everything of significance in his life that he would ever do, blundered head down into a group of students handing out flowers and handbills. Before he could retrieve his dropped book bag and move on to continue composing in his head a memorable letter of resignation, his eye had fallen on a grubby teenage girl, and he was hopelessly entrapped.

Thinking to break the spell, he boldly said to her, "Aren't you

in my class in elementary topology?"

She licked the raspberry snow cone she was holding and said, without a trace of a smile, "You must be mad. I'm not a student, just a wandering Gypsy fortune-teller." She held out the snow cone for him to take a lick. "Do you have a place where we could go, and I would tell your fortune?"

The mathematician knew she was no Gypsy, for your modern, urban Romany never allow themselves to be as dirty as she was. He was certain she was putting him on, but his mood of desperate boredom was such that he

said, "Cra-a-a-zy, Gypsy! Fall up to my pad, and we'll tell fortunes and other lies 'til the world melts."

They left hand in hand under the eyes of forty witnesses. Within their own sub-culture, however, the rebel students conformed to a rigid code; and they would have died rather than give information to the fuzz or even to the Dean of the Faculty; so the professor's absolute breach of propriety in picking up a student went unremarked and unreported.

When he had taken off her clothes, the girl was every bit as dirty as she appeared to be, but this only made him more determined to take advantage of her. Later, he persuaded her to shower by promising to bathe with her; and she looked, when she left, with her rum-colored hair in two long plaits, like a fresh-scrubbed Girl Scout.

The crust turned out to be her equivalent of the make-up that squares use; when he came past the common the next day, she was as delectably grimy as ever, and she held a fresh snow cone purple with grape syrup.

The two joined hands and went directly to his apartment. The young woman hardly spoke until late in the evening, after they had showered together. She was towelling her hair, and the infor-

mation came indistinctly. "I went to the Provost's office today," she said, "and told him about us."

The professor was so uncharacteristically content he contemplated the ruin of his academic career with pleasure. "All right, big mouth, how are we going to live?"

"I'm not really a Gypsy," she said, "but I really was in a carnival once, when I ran away before. I know how to dodge swords in a sword basket. Could you be an East Indian sword magician? We could pick up a show somewhere and travel right along with them."

"By God," cried the topologist. "I can do better than that! It's been a long time since I did any engineering work, but I have a little laboratory curiosity that will just fill the bill. Come with me to the animal house in the basement of the Psychology Department, and I'll show you something you won't believe."

"Try me, baby," replied his innamorata. "You'd be surprised at what I can believe."

They repaired to the noisome cages in which the experimental animals were kept, and the professor secured a sturdy mouse. Selecting a few strips of clear plastic from a rack, he lit a burner and uncorked a container of plastic adhesive. In a few min-

utes, the topologist had cobbled up a container which defied the eye to define its exact shape, but which most often seemed to be a lumpy cylinder. In a trice, he thrust the mouse in and clapped the square top down. The mouse could be seen through the plastic, but he seemed to be in a single fixed position, floating in midair with his paws and tail extended just as when he was inserted.

Heating a pointed rod, the professor pierced a hole first in one side of the bulgy cylinder, and then in the other. In a moment, when the long pin had cooled, he introduced its sharp point through the hole again, and having located the mouse properly, skewered the rodent through the heart so that the point of the sharpened rod came out the second hole. Swinging the cylinder over the girl's hand with a little shake, the professor deposited a tiny drop of bright arterial mouse blood on her wrist.

As she looked at the crimson drop, tears appeared, sparkling on her eyelids. "Big deal, big man," she said. "Mouse murder. I don't think a wild mouse would walk into that plastic pipe, do you?"

"Heart of my heart," he replied. "It's not a pipe. It isn't even a cylinder, and it certainly isn't a mousetrap. This is
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a tesseract, as you would know if you had ever read a popular work on topology."

"Oh, all right, I know what a tesseract is: an expanded cube, a cube with a cube on each face. That mouse cage doesn't look like six cubes surrounding a cube to me."

"No, otherwise our mouse would be dead all over. This is a tesseract which is a temporal illusion."

"A temporal illusion!"

"Yes, my dear," he said, "a temporal illusion. Topology teaches us that mathematical properties can be quite independent of apparent shape. A circle is still a circle, even though it looks like a scalloped pie crust — as it may, if it is drawn on a wavy surface. This mouse cage is a cubed cube which is partly displaced along the dimension of time. That's why it appears formless and shifting. Here, feel it."

Sure enough, to the touch, it was solid enough: a cube with a cube on each face; but even when held in the hand and sensed by touch, the object still appeared to be a rippling cylinder, and the mouse still appeared to be stock still.

"This mouse looks dead. Eccch!" she said.

Deftly the topologist withdrew the tiny sword, pried off the top, and shook Mr. Mouse out in his

hand, where the charming little fellow at once sat up on his haunches and waved his fore-paws, as if demanding cheese.

"How did you do that?" cried the girl.

"Simply, really," replied the thinker. "The exterior flickers in and out of this moment of time, because of the subtle twist I imparted to the shape when I made it; but the inside is *fixed* in time, because much of the internal mass is stretched all the way around the very large but finite continuum of space and time which is our universe. This little rascal's 'time' has passed so slowly that the powerful regenerative and repair processes of his body have worked as if instantaneously, and the apparently mortal wound dealt him was no more than a pin prick. Do you think you could get into a large tesseract like this one and let me run a rapier through you . . . knowing it would do you no harm?"

She clapped her hands in pleasure. "Oh yes, lover! That'll be so much more of a mind buster than some old wicker basket that everybody knows I dodge the sword in."

So they hied themselves to a plastic supply house and thence to a dog-and-pony show that was in the neighborhood, and for a long time, every thing

went like a guided trip with Tim Leary. Audiences were transfixed by the girl's beauty. She was considerably cleaner under the difficult circumstances of carnival trouping than she had been when soap and water were conveniently to be had, and when the topologist drove a sharpened fencing foil through her lovely body, clad as lightly as local ordinance allowed, the crowds gasped. When the box was rotated to show the point of the sword encarnadined, strong men fainted. Later they would press forward and pay a dollar apiece to examine the tiny wound as it closed up and disappeared, usually midway up her delightfully articulated rib cage.

Trouping the carnival together was an idyll. Still, even if forty years is not *old*, neither is it young; and the doctor of mathematics at last realized that he was bored again. The girl's vocabulary never enlarged itself appreciably, and the snow cone remained her favorite confection. The difference in their ages was sufficient for their basic sex attitudes to be irreconcilable. For him, a certain overtone of the forbidden gave carnal love its highest stimulation; but for her, sex was just another natural function, like perspiring or excreting, so that the level of their love-making remained at mere technical proficiency.

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After the fashion her generation had adopted, she was faithful. There might be others later, her manner implied by its playfulness; but for now, she did not share her favors out. He was denied even the sour spice of jealousy.

At the end of their last appearance each evening, she was often wearing only transparent pantaloons and a shiny little brief, and when they had walked back to their quarters, she would hold up her arms and, stamping her naked feet softly like a harem dancer, say, "Help me get ready for my bath, lover." If he approached and began to roll down the waist band of her sa-teen pants, she would drop her arms and begin to undress him too. Later they would bathe each other.

They had almost no other conversation.

At last the idyll became an enslavement to the professor. He found some respite when he learned that a Hindu tortureman, their neighbor in the show, who slept on nails, poured boiling lead in his eyes, and so on, was a Failed M.A. in Mathematics from the University of Rawalpundi. By talking to him, the topologist was able to keep from going quite mad. Still, he was a little off. He loathed the girl and

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dreamed only of what he would do when she left him; but she would not leave and continued to raise her arms to him and stamp her feet, as exquisitely irritating as a kitten which continues to claw one's sock after one has done playing with it.

He began to do everything badly, even their turn in the show, which had never much interested him after he put the big tesseract together. Once he missed the hole with his thrust, and the plastic deflected the point of the foil into his toe. This was a real wound, in real time, not spread along the space-time continuum, and was extremely painful for a week. Each time he limped, the pain made him more resolved to be quit of her, until at last his fertile topological mind saw the way.

He had a regular armorer's store of swords with which he made play in their act, and one evening he laid handy, next to their bed, a very passable imitation of a Roman short sword. In its day, that design had been a great technological breakthrough for the weapons makers, and it was beautifully shaped to destructive stabbing.

When they came in that night, he skimmed off her tawdry cape with a flourish, and as she lifted her round arms and stamped one foot, he peeled the bottom of her costume off in one extravagant

gesture, and then gave her the pleasure of chasing him and tearing off his garments. As they were towelling each other after their ritual coupling and bathing, he kissed her, tender but preoccupied, as it were, and said, "My dear, would you mind letting me practice that last pass in the act? I just don't seem to be putting that foil home right."

She was so pleased to have him pleasant again that she scamp-ered into the spare tesseract they had in the quarters, a few drops from the bath still glistening on one flank. She turned her face up to him with a grin that almost made him reconsider the irreversible act he had planned. Then he remembered the months of boredom and hardened his heart. Decisively, he tapped the top home. Without a tremor, he put the Roman sword as nearly into her heart as he could judge its location through the subtle time shifting in the plastic. With that, he snapped off the blade, so that the sword also was within the spread, slowed effect of the moving time field; and gave the construction a knowledgeable kick or two which caused it to collapse into itself. Instead of a knobby cylinder, as it had appeared when it was an expanded cube blurred by time, it now appeared to be a single cube about six inches on

a side, with an abstract pattern in each face.

The collapsed cube was much heavier than it looked, but not nearly as heavy as the girl, for a substantial part of her mass was distributed along the whole of the cylindri-co-spherical space-time continuum. As he gazed at the mirror-like surface of one square face, an eye and eyebrow slowly spread flatly across the plane; but there was neither panic nor recognition in the eye as he stared into it. He realized that to the occupant of this peculiar box, his movements were so fast in appearance as to be a mere blur. Whistling, the professor packed the weighty cube into his bag, and strolled off the lot, casually remarking to his Hindu neighbor, "So long, we're jumping this flea circus."

By changing into one of his old natural shoulder suits at the bus station, he simply disappeared as Grax, the Swordsman of Time (his carnival billing), and reincarnated himself as a topologist of considerable talent who had been vaguely on sabbatical for a while.

The frustrations that had so nearly consumed him before his adventure seemed to have been burned and purged away. He settled with pleasure into a new academic routine and be-

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came expert in its execution. Once in five years, perhaps, he had a really promising student; but the scarcity no longer bothered him. As he advanced up the ladder of academic tenure and preferment, he was able to place a few brilliant people about himself, and life was as good, he now knew, as it was ever going to be.

The heavy cube was a paperweight on the desk in his apartment. No one else ever recognized the shifting abstract patterns in its silvery sides as the topologized contours of a dead human being. At great intervals, there would drift across one face or another of the prism some recognizable anatomical feature with which the professor was intimately acquainted, and he would feel a vague regret for his act and a light stirring, as of the ashes in a cold grate, of his appetite for the one adventure of his life. He would stuff his pipe, turn the pages of the *Journal of Topology* and immerse himself once more in the calm, sweet life of the university.

When he was sixty years old and almost bald, there appeared in his classes the student of his dreams, who understood everything he said in his arcane specialty and replied with fresh and elegant insights into the intuitive sort of math in which they both delighted. Objectively, he knew

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the boy was neat and trim rather than handsome, yet subjectively (and privately, of course: he was very proper now), he always felt the boy was "good looking." This feeling puzzled him until one day he had to move a stack of old college annuals and, browsing, as one will, he suddenly came on his own senior picture. His best student was enough like his youthful self to be a double, or at least a younger brother.

Shortly after that, the professor confided the story of his escape to the boy. He could not have said why he did so, and it certainly was not wise; but the student was beginning to betray the same weird talent the professor had for translating topological abstractions into hardware that did peculiar things, and somehow the tale just told itself. He had become very fond indeed of his disciple. The boy, who affected the total amorality which was the fashion of his generation, was nevertheless shocked; but he was also intrigued. He picked up the box and shook it. "Maybe she's alive," he said. "After all, inside it's only been an instant. Let's unlock it."

"Don't be ridiculous," the professor said, taking the cube back and setting it on his desk in a definite manner. "In the first place, she's not alive. While she's

in the construction, there's no evidence of the crime. Second, if she were alive, she might go to the police; or worse yet, she might expect me to take up that dreadful, boring liaison with her again. And in the third place, we can't unlock it. That was the whole point of breaking the sword. The cube's a closed system now, and no part of the interior is available to this aspect of time and space. Eventually she'll be equally distributed through the entire universe. Absolutely not! I forbid you to think about it. When are you going to give me that paper on topological re-intervertebrates?"

Conversation languished, and the student shortly took his leave. A day or two later, the professor found the boy fiddling the edges of the cube with a device made of mirrors, and they had a genuine quarrel, but gradually fell back almost into their former sympathetic teacher-student relation.

One day the student appeared in the professor's apartment with a tiny glittering piece of metal in his hand, the shape of which was extraordinarily hard to see. The whole thing seemed to flicker in and out of the mathematician's sight. "What the hell have you got there?" he asked the boy in irritation.

"It's a chrome-plated, self-powered, retractable, inverted, universally jointed and fully gurgitated mobius strip," the young man said.

The professor laughed. Every schoolboy knows a mobius strip is a band one end of which has been given a half twist before joining it to the other to make a circlet. The consequence of that little twist (try it) is that the mobius strip is a geometric figure which has only one side and one edge; though common sense, looking at it, can plainly discern two sides and two edges. However, a pencil drawn down the center of "one side" will meet its own mark and there will then be seen to be a line drawn on "both sides" . . . because there is only one side, you see?

But every schoolboy knows that's all a mobius strip is: just a curiosity. Anything else you do to it changes it from being a mobius strip. So it can't be improved by chroming it or powering it or anything else. The professor pointed all this out to his student in a rather overbearing manner. He finished by saying, "And I suppose you're going to tell me it has some practical application."

"Yes," said the boy, "it has." And before the professor could stop him, he had reached across the desk, penetrated into the shiny cube with one half of the

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glittering mobius strip and fished out the shattered remnant of a short Roman stabbing sword.

In an instant, the old familiar bulgy cylinder was present on the desk, full size, and in another, a completely naked young woman had leaped out of it onto the floor. In stupefaction, the professor saw a pink, three-cornered scar, obviously just healing, on her rib cage, and noticed there were still drops of water glistening on her flank.

"Sweetheart!" she cried, "what was that *butcher* knife? I had to dodge like crazy!" And she engulfed the student in a squid-like embrace. A moment later she saw the professor and recoiled.

"Who is this bald-headed old creep?" she said. "I draw the line at voyeurs, honey." And with a wink and a nod, she and the student dumped the professor in-

to the expanded cube and collapsed it about him.

Even in the endless instant which is the inside of his device, time has begun to seem long to the topologist. He knows the girl and the student are long since dust in the whirling, kaleidoscopic world outside. He is beginning to be transparent, so he knows his substance is slowly plating out along the entire cylindrico-spherical space-time continuum. He has realized that when he is fully distributed, the universe will be at an end; and he has composed a most astounding paper in his head explaining the whole phenomenon. His only regret is that he will never be able to send it to the *Journal of Topology* for publication.

— H. H. HOLLIS

This Month in IF —

THE MAN IN THE MAZE

by Robert Silverberg

THE RIM GODS

by A. Bertram Chandler

THE PRODUCT OF THE MASSES

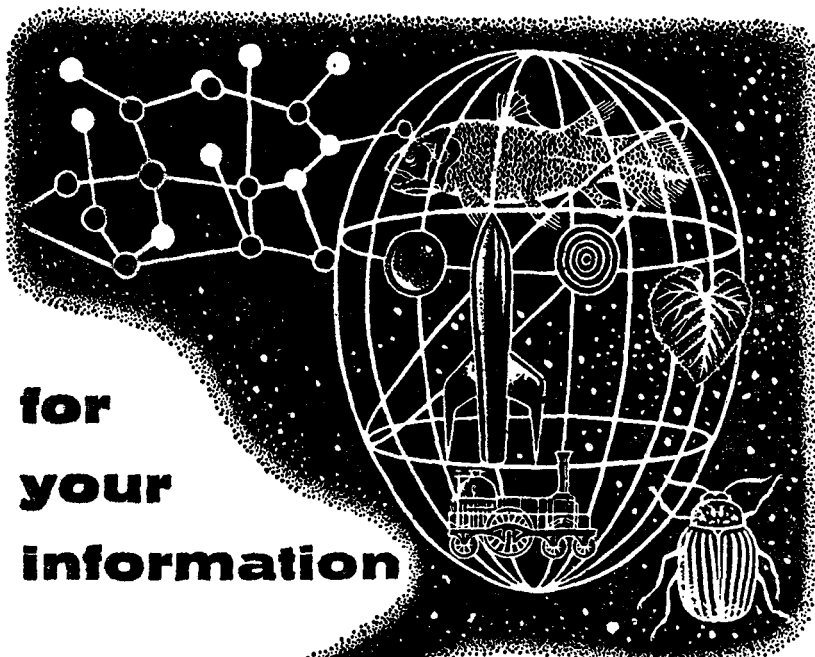
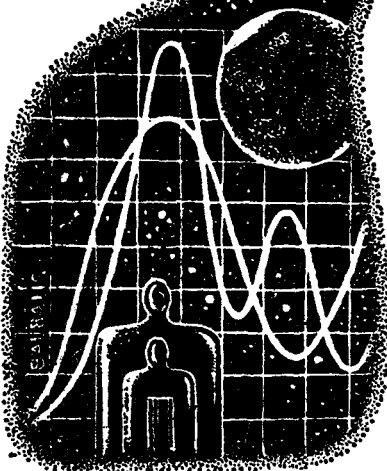
by John Brunner

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SWORD GAME

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**for
your
information**



BY WILLY LEY

THE DEVIL'S APPLES

The scientific name of the potato plant is *Solanum tuberosum*, and it is an entrenched opinion in Europe that the biggest potatoes grow in the fields of the dumbest peasants. But if you want to quote this proverb within earshot of one of the aforementioned peasants you say that "the volume of the tubers of Sol-

anum tuberosum is inversely proportional to the intelligence of its producer."

The ordinary potato, like the sweet potato, is an American plant; and many years ago, in a description of Mexico, I read the statement that potatoes, when planted in Yucatan, begin to taste sweetish after the first generation and have turned into sweet potatoes after the third generation. I don't know who saddled the innocent visitor to Mexico with that hoax. Factually speaking the sweet potato is a member of the *Convolvulus* or morning glory family, while the ordinary potato is one of the nightshades. They are not at all related except that both are flowering plants.

By now it must have become clear that this column is going to be about the potato, the lowly spud. That colloquial term, one can sometimes read, is supposed to have been derived from the initials of an anti-potato society said to have been in existence around the year 1880. The letters are supposed to stand for Society for the Prevention of Unwholesome Diet. A nice story, but a "spud" actually is a special kind of narrow-bladed spade used for cutting roots—the name of the tool was transferred to what it brought to light.

The early history of the potato
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is fairly complicated, as will soon be seen; but let us dwell on the names of this useful vegetable for awhile.

The potato had been "discovered" by the Spaniards in the realm of the Incas, where it went under the name of *papa*. The Spaniards could not adopt this name, which in their own language designates the pope. A tribal dialect proved more useful by furnishing the word *patata*; we still use it in a little changed form.

In Italy the new vegetable was called *taratufflo* or *taratuffoli*; to the Frenchman Olivier de Serres this sounded clumsy, and he coined a French equivalent: *cartoufle*. However the French, when potatoes became common, used another name, *pomme de terre*, or "earth apple." The Dutch adopted that name, in translation, of course, and called it *Aardappel*. The Germans, on the other hand, adopted the earlier French name, making it *Kartoffel*, and the Russians, who got their potatoes from Germany also took over the "German" name. The Hungarians seem to have imported their first potatoes from Burgandy because their word is still *burgonya*.

The continent of origin of the cultivated potato is South America, specifically the West Coast of South America, and more

specifically the large island of Chiloe, located just off shore under 40° southern latitude. The outstanding expert on the history of cultivated plants, the late Professor Nikolai Ivanovitch Vavilov, considered the Chiloe strain to be the main ancestor of our potato for an interesting reason. The tropical versions, he said, were adapted to a climate where the length of the day does not vary much throughout the year. But Europe north of the Alps and Russia (and, of course, the United States north of 35° northern latitude) have long summer days. Under these conditions the tropical South American forms fail to produce tubers. The Chiloe strain, however, was adapted to long summer days and became the most important for this reason.

Potatoes reached Europe beginning about 1570, and older writers on cultivated plants invariably assumed that they were brought in the familiar form of the tubers. More recently this assumption has been re-examined and proved wrong. The ships did not sail from, say, Antofagasta to Europe with a cargo of potatoes for the purpose of introducing the new plant. They sailed for many reasons, most of them larcenous by present-day standards, and they had no schedules. They stayed at sea for weeks at a time and then spent more weeks at

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various stopover places, the whole voyage adding up to years. Potatoes, just dumped into barrels, simply do not last that long. In addition to the long travel times during which tubers would have rotted away or dried out, another factor speaks against the older assumption. Nobody then, from the simplest peasant to the most learned botanist-physician, had ever raised a plant from a piece of a tuber with an "eye" in it. Plants grew from seeds and sometimes from a transplanted root. Tubers were not known to these people; the only edible "underground" vegetables were beets and turnips, that had been planted, and truffles, that just happened without cultivation.

In short: the potato must have traveled as seeds.

Who carried those seeds?

Since it is always easy to credit somebody whose name is famous for other reasons, Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir John Hawkins and Sir Francis Drake have all been hailed for the introduction of the potato. But the facts of history happen to contradict. Sir Walter Raleigh could not have brought potatoes from Virginia in 1585 because there were no potatoes in Virginia before 1700, or even later. And he never went to Peru where they were actually cultivated in his time.

As for Sir John Hawkins, it is

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true that he brought something from America in 1565, but it was *Ipomoea batatas*, the sweet potato. Sir Francis Drake seems to have been credited just on principle; in Offenburg, southwest Germany, there even stands his statue with an inscription proclaiming that he brought potatoes to Europe "in the Year of Our Lord 1580." But there is no contemporary record that he did. The ones who actually did are nameless, though it is certain that

they were Spaniards, and it is likely that they were monks. And it may have been done because of suspected medicinal properties rather than because of the food value.

It is known that Spaniards in what is now Colombia, Ecuador and Chile knew about potatoes around the middle of the sixteenth century but refused to eat them. On the other hand the place where potatoes were first eaten

John Gerard of London, holding a potato flower.
From the title page of a late edition of his *Herball*.



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in Europe was a hospital in Seville in 1573. That there was a medical aura around the new plant is shown by the fact that Philip II of Spain ordered potatoes sent to him from Peru. After they had been harvested the king sent a number of tubers to the pope, and the pope passed them on to his ambassador to the Netherlands because he was sick. Some of them, in turn, were passed on to the Prefect of Mons, Philippe de Suvry, and he gave two to Jules Charles de l'Escluse (or Carolus Clusius, 1526-1609). Clusius received this gift because he was supervisor of the herb and flower gardens of Emperor Maximilian II of Austria. Clusius cultivated them in the Imperial Gardens of Vienna and Frankfurt am Main. Later, when he planned the Botanical Garden of Leyden (Holland), the potato took root there too, so that Clusius should be credited with the actual introduction of the potato in Continental Europe.

The main interest may have been medical, but the fact that the potato plant has very pretty flowers seems to have helped. Rudolph Jakob Camerarius, physician and botanist, grew them in his garden at Nurnberg in 1588. Count von Helfenstein had potato plants in his garden in Silesia in 1595. The Landgrave of Hessen-Cassel cultivated them in

1590 and sent a bag of tubers to King Christian I of Saxony during the following year. That the pretty flower intrigued many is also shown by the fact that John Gerard of London had himself pictured on the title page of one of his works holding a potato flower. (Fig. 1.)

John Gerard (1545-1607) was professionally what was then known as a "barber-surgeon," but plants were his main interest. He had a famous garden himself and was also the supervisor of the

Fig. 2. The earliest known picture of a potato plant. From John Gerard's *Herball* of 1597. The name used by Gerard was *Battata Virginiana*, indicating his mistaken belief that the plant was native to Virginia.



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Fig. 3. The potato plant as shown in the *Rariorum Plantarum Historia* of Carolus Clusius (1601).

gardens of Lord Burleigh. His first literary work was a list and description of all the plants growing in his own garden in Holborn; this was followed in 1597 by a much bigger work with the title, *The Herball or Generall Historie of Plantes*. It contains the first published picture of a potato plant. (Fig. 2.)

This *Herball*, sad to relate, was not really John Gerard's own work. It was a piece of literary shenanigans. A Dutchman, Rem-
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bert Dodoens (Latinized as Dodonaeus, 1517-1585), who for a time had been court physician to Emperor Maximilian II, had written a book the medicinal "virtues" of plants that was published in 1554. It was written in Flemish, but Clusius immediately translated it into French as *Histoire des plantes*. This was followed by other plant books, and in 1563 the publisher van der Loe brought out a collection of Dodoens's writings that became known as the *Pemptades*. Then

the London publisher John Norton requested a London physician, Dr. Priest, to translate the *Pemptades* into English, but Dr. Priest died before he finished his work.

John Gerard said piously in the foreward to his *Herball* that Dr. Priest had started a translation, "but being prevented by death, his translation likewise perished." Not so, barber-surgeon Gerard!

Actually Gerard had taken the translation, finished it, edited it and added a number of items. One of the added items was the picture of the potato plant. But as Gerard thought that it had come from Virginia, he named it accordingly.

A much better description, and also a much better picture, was published in 1601 by Clusius (Fig. 3.) The book had the title *Rariorum Plantarum Historia* — the history of rare plants. Actually the potato was not rare any more in Europe at the time. Contemporary chroniclers tell us that Silesian peasants made fires of straws and twigs and roasted the tubers in the ashes. But elsewhere in Europe the potato was suspect then and for many years to come. It had first been grown in herb gardens among many herbs known to be poisonous. It probably was poisonous too, thought the suspicious Europeans, and besides there was a taint of magic



Fig. 4. Somewhat stylized potato plant from the *Prodromus* of Gaspard (or Caspar) Bauhin, 1620. Bauhin used the name *Solanum tuberosum eculentum*.

about something that grew underground. The peasants would have nothing to do with "the devil's apples."

It needed a number of years with bad crops and famines (17-71-1774) to convince even the superstitious that these "apples" could be eaten without harm to body and soul.

What could happen when you were dealing with a plant of

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which the average man knew nothing is nicely illustrated by a story about the city councillors of Berlin. Friedrich Wilhelm, Prince of Brandenburg and known to history as the Great Elector (1620-1688), had heard of the new vegetable. There was a park in Berlin known as the *Lustgarten* (pleasure garden), and in 1651 he ordered the planting of potatoes in it. When they were ready to be harvested he invited the city councillors to a meal; they were to tell him what they thought of potatoes.

It is claimed that the cook who was to prepare the meal had never seen a potato plant before. He did not know about the tubers — or if he did he distrusted them — so he had the round green capsules containing the seeds picked for the meal. They felt pretty hard to him, so he simmered them for a long time with a pinch of salt.

It so happens that the seed capsules have quite a bitter taste. The councillors took one bite and felt distressed. How could they thank their prince for this "treat"?

Some reasoned that something might still have to be done, but additional salt and pepper only

made it worse. Melted butter ameliorated the situation to some extent — but not enough. Well, they had been asked to state their opinion, and this they had to do, even if the situation was unpleasant all around. They composed a careful document that began with an assertion of utmost loyalty and went on to say that none of those present had been pleased with the new vegetable. Its taste was bitter and tart, and it did not become palatable, *not even when sugared*.

While the story of how the potato came to Europe is incomplete, the story of how it came to the United States is virtually nonexistent. The colonists in Virginia and Carolina may or may not have grown potatoes from seeds or tubers obtained from Spanish sea captains. The earliest authentic report from the United States says that potatoes were grown at Londonderry, N. H., in 1719, and that the plants had been brought over from Ireland.

And that's why the plant from the island of Chiloe off South America came to be called the Irish potato in North America.

— WILLY LEY

INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE FICTION — 2nd Issue
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Touch of the Moon

by ROSS ROCKLYNNE



Illustrated by
ADKINS

I
A beautiful evening on Earth
was just the thing for a man

who's been on the Moon too long.
In fact, he had to return to Earth.
And he'd better, at least once
every once in a while. But once

*Keep off Earth, you Lunarians!
The gravity's enough to kill you,
even if the local customs don't!*



in awhile, how often was that? The doctor he asked that question of shook his head.

"No matter how long or how

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short a time you stay away, you're going to run into difficulties," he said. "You'll be mighty uncomfortable on Earth

after living on Luna. Why not give it up, or else go back for good?"

That was the problem, Earth or the Moon, you just couldn't have both.

"I got a girl there, that's all," said Martin. "She's beautiful and good —"

"— and can outwalk you and outrun you; hit harder than you and dance harder than you. You're sagging; she's bouncing. You've been outwitted by gravity, son. Find yourself a Moon Maid."

Martin was anguished. He had a good job with the government on the Moon, and there were office girls all around him who would jump at the chance to go with him anywhere. And when one uses the word jump, it is singularly appropriate.

"We had a jumpin' good time," Martin's office partner would say, for instance. "Mary and me." On one particular occasion, he added casually, "By the way. I got a Mabel stacked away where I live who's looking for a good-looking Geophile such as yourself. She's homesick for stories about Earth. Why not give her a tumble?"

Hard as it was for Martin to get Barbara off his mind, he did go dancing one night with Mabel and a bunch of other Slant-people. If you wonder about the term "Slant-people," don't. It's

you and me when we're on the Moon. On Earth when you walk you slant forward some but it's not noticeable. On the Moon when you walk, it is: you slant forward a full thirty-five degrees. It's a natural compensation for the low gravity. You unconsciously put yourself into a series of falling positions, much like the Moon itself as it falls around the Earth. That's why dancing is popular on the Moon. You hold each other up, for the most part. People get tired of walking with their faces near the floor.

Anyway, Mabel didn't work out. She had a permanent crick in her neck from trying to keep her eyes level the five years she'd been here, and she was unable to dance in the vertical. This created problems. He put pressure on the small of her back trying to force her to assume a better center of gravity, but she didn't know what the problem was and couldn't cooperate. He told her some stories about Earth, as it was three months ago when he left, but made it all so uninteresting, deliberately, that she decided to stay outside Earth the rest of her life like the medics told her she had to.

Martin pursued his lonely course, every day going to the YMCA and vigorously performing his serious exercises. The

trouble was it was easy to chin yourself, so what were you gaining? You were exercising for the Moon's gravity. There were, of course, machines which rotated you at one gee. They were not satisfactory, inasmuch as the center bar was only six feet away from his feet; simulated gravity fell off too fast.

There were the sliding racks which whizzed you around the floor and the ceiling of the gymnasium and pulled at you with one gee also. On these racks one could do regular sitting-up exercises and even lift weights. But it was hazardous considering that some of this was done upside-down. Besides, there were only two racks at the YMCA, and they were in demand. Other means of exercise included workouts from the masseurs, but one could not afford them all the time.

Besides, it was all a very big bore.

Martin went to his superior in cost-accounting and asked or begged for some kind of solution.

"I've got this girl on Earth," he began, "and she's beautiful and good —"

"— and can already outslug you," said his superior in such a manner that Martin knew he had run into the oldest and corniest of Moon jokes: your Earth girl can wrap you into a pretzel and serve you with her beer.

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"But I have to go back," insisted Martin, "before it's too late. I figure if you could let me have a month I could take a crash exercise course and build myself back up into the he-man I was. I think you understand the problem."

"I do indeed," his superior said, shrugging. He opened the periscope on his desk, rotated the over-Moon viewer twenty degrees and picked up Earth. "There it is," he said, a note of sadness creeping into his voice. "I'll never go there again, nor will my wife and children."

"You found it possible to give up Earth," nodded Martin tragically.

"Had to, son. But my family stays with me wherever I go, so it isn't too bad. Once a year I alternate jobs and go to Mars and spend a few months there. We run into old friends, scads of them, migrating back and forth for the same reason we do, to tone up our muscles and our nervous plexi with a shot of a heavier gravity, so we keep our Tarot packs hot. But my two boys —" He chuckled, and gestured at Earth.

"Look at it. There's where my memories and all my nostalgias lie. But my two growing sons get the shivers from it, because it looks heavy. I don't know whether this is because they've been

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studying Earth in school, or whether they know instinctively they aren't built to live there. Such is life.

"As for your request," he said, opening the drawer in front of him and extracting some forms, "it's a fairly common one. Take a month — take six weeks, if you want. Maybe you can talk your girl into taking the Government tests and get her on the Moon. That's about the only solution I can see, unless you decide to do it the hard way and stay on Earth, which would be a pity. However, maybe you'll decide your girl isn't worth the sacrifice."

"Oh, she's worth it, sir. She's really worth any sacrifice. She's beautiful and high-principled — and good. And," he added, straight-faced, "she can probably already outslug me."

Martin took the shuttle out of Luna City two days later. He took all his possessions with him, because of the uncertainty of his venture. He sat with the operator of the shuttle and broodingly watched Earth get larger. There was Home; there was where his emotions were rooted, and those emotions would never let go. But he would blossom so far beyond the actual soil of Terra that, some day, he could never return. This was man's

destiny, to rain his seeds on the other worlds of the universe and always, aching, to remember Earth.

There was one other passenger aboard the shuttle, who came forward just once and got himself introduced to Martin. This other passenger was a remarkable person, with the beautifully shaped head, the symmetrical and pleasing jawline, the forthright expression, the massively formed hands and arms of a man born to the military. He was Major Whit Randolph, USA retired, now attached to the United Nations.

"The UN won't let me get trapped on the Moon or Mars and certainly not —" he almost spat the name — "Enceladus. They give me two days on the Moon, no more. I make my inspection of the Base and write my report and then come back to Earth, which I'm doing now. I won't get off Earth again until after the next session of the UN. Then I go to Mars."

"That's a bit longer away," said Martin. "But the flights are all rotary gravitized, so I hear."

"By law," nodded Randolph. "The gravity-terrace effect; you pick your own weight." He produced his card. "You've got a problem, so if you want, call me, if only to talk. Until the UN meets, however I can be talked

into anything. However, I do have a suggestion. Make an application when we land on the Platform to stay at the City Training-In Center — that's the best-equipped and best-staffed rehabilitation center in the Americas. I should know."

A massive fist rubbed at massive jaw; his gaze fastened pensively and somewhat darkly on the inexorably looming planet of their birth. One could imagine his lips, half-curved, muttering a curse, for reasons unknown. He returned his full attention to Martin.

"That's another thing," he said. "In any event, if anybody can crank you up to run like an Earth machine, *they* can." He smiled. "By the time you get to Earth, Martin, you'll know if you've been accepted — by the fact that you will or will not be met at the ship by an ambulance, which will take you direct to the Center. Once they decide to help you, they don't want you walking even an inch on Earth without their supervision. It will cost you ninety dollars a day, but it's worth it."

Martin treasured Randolph's card and placed it carefully in his billfold. He was genuinely grateful to have a man of Randolph's stature make this gesture toward him. He suspected, however, that Randolph was at loose ends and

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was making the gesture in hopes that Martin would call him. Martin decided he would.

II

The City Training-In Center, which accepted Martin, and did indeed meet him with an ambulance and a stretcher at the space port, demonstrated its efficiency by never once allowing him to feel he was involved in the task of his own rehabilitation. He was lifted and rolled; he was turned over and floated. The medical staff calibrated the responses of every muscle in his body. The exercises he was required to perform were aimed at specific muscles, but they were so programmed that he seemed to be merely at play. He was also given considerable help with precise machines which spun him, patted him, stretched him, bent him, beat him, fluff-dried him. So, on the third day, Martin called San Francisco and spoke to his girl, which turned out to be a mistake.

"Well, no," he said bemusedly, "I can't come there now, don't you see I should spend a week here to get used to Earth after being away three months? I've got four more days here."

"Well," she said from three and a half thousand miles away, "that means you can't get here until

Thursday, and I'll be leaving for Japan Thursday. I have a demanding job, Martin."

"Meet you at the Kobe office, then, Friday?" he said hopefully.

"Not unless you want my boss to chaperone us twenty-three hours a day with phone calls, which he's liable to do. I'll tell you what. I'll meet you there tomorrow morning, and we'll have a few bewitched hours together. You've been gone too too long!" She gave him an address high over Park Avenue and made kissing sounds over the phone.

"All right, hon," he said slowly, and hung up.

He hadn't even seen her face; she hadn't even thrown in the visio.

Tomorrow morning, then.

Dr. V. Weller, the Director of the City Training-In Center, was exasperated even before Martin finished explaining his position. "I know what you're trying to say," he said. "It's very very obvious. Your fiancée has put you in a bind, and you don't know how to refuse her. But three days isn't enough, Martin, it just isn't enough."

"I'll be gone an hour!" said Martin. "That's all!"

"Phh. So you say." The acid little man leaned back and shook his head. "How often we've had to explain to young men such as yourself that your ardor far out-

matches your capacity to perform! Exactly what do you think you'll be able to do with your girl once you're with her?"

"Well — well, what do you mean, do?" Martin faltered. "You must understand that although we are —"

The other quieted him down, patting the air with an antiseptic white hand. "No, I mean just the simple act of *meeting* her. Of standing there. Of throwing your arms about her. Of grabbing her and kissing her. Do you understand how much oxygen debt your muscles will build up from those simple acts? Your *Moon-muscles*?"

Martin simply acted miserably dumb. "I don't know what an oxygen debt is."

"Naturally not," Dr. V. Weller said sarcastically, picking up Martin's chart and glaring at it. "You young dancing Moon men never do. Why do you think we pick you up in an ambulance and handle you like a baby, once we accept you? Well, remember this if you can. Muscles work *anero-bically*. Without oxygen, that is."

"Anerobically," said Martin, crestfallen. "I remember. There are some anerobes on Mars. On Earth too. I think."

"That's another thing! Let me finish. Muscles contract *anero-bically*. The organism simply

draws upon a store of energy accumulated by previous oxidative processes. But when that store of energy, an organic phosphate, begins to decline, the organism must supply new oxygen. My God, boy, by the time you get off your first kiss to your sweetie, you'll be panting like a love-struck stud!"

Martin sank lower in his wheelchair. "That's putting it rather crudely," he said, "but it gives me a picture."

"It better give you a picture," the little man said, waving Martin's chart fiercely. "The Lunar environment weakens the muscular organ by giving the body an excuse not to manufacture any more adenosine triphosphate than it finds necessary. A valuable habit pattern is lost; the organism has to learn all over again what is required of it on Earth, do you understand? In a manner of speaking, the organism has to learn it isn't on the Moon any more. Oh, sure, you know you're on Earth. But do your tissues? They don't."

"I see that now," said Martin, his voice weak and yielding. Oh, boy, he thought, I shouldn't have called her; now how am I going to keep that date? And he would have to keep it somehow, somehow. By proxy, maybe.

The sudden idea straightened his backbone. He said, nodding

his chin with new force at the chart this unpleasant little man was glaring fiercely at, "I take it, then, that the doctors have found nothing serious."

"No, your health hasn't been damaged seriously by your stay on the Moon. You have a minor calcium leakage from the osseous structures, but usually this clears up in the eight or nine days we keep you here. And your —"

"Eight days? Nine days?"

"Yes, that's right," the man said, running his fingers in a crooked line on the chart and frowning mightily. "In your case, maybe a total of nine days."

"Six more days," said Martin, sliding down in the wheel chair and looking laxly at the ceiling. "And it was supposed to be four more days. Maybe you'll decide it should be seven more days. Or ten more days. Or never. Maybe you'll decide I've been on the Moon too long, that after all it's still highly problematical that anybody can really have a full-time recovery, everything's still in the experimental stage, at ninety dollars a day —"

Dr. V. Weller suddenly was on his feet. He said icily, "Mr. Beales, if you would like to terminate our contract, be sure you will receive no bill from us. We accept money only from those we have been successful with. Now if you are implying —"

Martin shook his head and managed a sick grin as he started to turn the chair. "You've told me what I wanted to know," he said.

"I hope so. You dried-up, dancing Moon-men who think you can come back to Earth and right away compete with those of us who've had the good sense —" He sat down abruptly, throwing Martin's chart aside and burying his face in other papers. Martin figured that Dr. V. Weller felt he had said too much, implied too much. Martin rolled out sourly. So everybody had problems.

That evening he called Major Whit Randolph at his Wisconsin home and left a curious elation when he heard the man's crisp, wide-awake voice. Then, as the visio strengthened, he saw with astonishment that Randolph was in pajamas, short hair, the color of a dried leaf, uncombed.

"But you sounded wide-awake," he exclaimed.

"You have to be," said Randolph cryptically, lighting up. "I've been in a war and a half, you know." He studied Martin forthrightly. "You made it to the Center," he said. "But you've got problems. What's up?" Smoke shot from the corner of his mouth.

"I made the mistake of calling my girl before I was ready,"

Martin told him in embarrassment. "Now the director here says I don't have what it takes to carry on a romance — any *part* of a romance, even — until I've put in nine days here. In the meantime, I've made a date with her here in New York, and she's arriving tomorrow morning."

But Randolph was already nodding his head, coolly flicking ashes.

"The difficulty falls into a common pattern," he said. "The pattern being that you can't explain matters to her. When can you ever? Luckily, I was tubing to New York the day after tomorrow — I can't stand that Loop shot, it's always the tube for me — but I'll change my plans and meet your girl for you. How does that sound?"

His eyes, which had been moving rather restlessly in his face, now beamed directly at Martin.

"Why — why it sounds great," said Martin, taken aback first by the offer and then by the direct and somehow challenging question appended to it. "It would — well, it would certainly take me off the hook, if you know what I mean. Are you sure —?"

"That it isn't putting me out? Hardly! Just tell me when and where you're supposed to meet your girl and what she likes to drink."

Martin awoke often that night.

Finally, he was staring out the window at the gray morning, and he felt baffled and constricted by the inanities of this universe he must necessarily live in. Here he was, weakened by a stay of a few short weeks on the Moon, and his pride in his feeling of manhood had put him in the position of turning over his girl to another man; a drinking man, a military man. A man twenty years older than Barbara — but what was twenty years to a man of Randolph's vitality?

Barbara called Martin two nights later from Japan.

"But it's all *right*," she trilled, laughing. "It was a wonderful idea. Darling, I'm so glad you let me meet the major. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. And the places he took us —"

"Us?" Martin's ears pricked up.

"He had a date, of course. It was so unselfish of him to include me. As it turns out, it was lucky for him, because his date got sick at the Earth Turn — we were sitting on the inside circle near the tintinnabula, so there wasn't that much spin — I just don't know what hit her, except that she was a tiny little thing, all eyes, and so tired. Anyway, we took her back to her apartment and put her to bed. Naturally, I consoled your dar-

ling major by sharing another round of drinks." She giggled from ten thousand miles away. "Oh, we really rode the mare!"

"I imagine," said Martin dryly. Gazing upon the pixie, freckled face of his beloved he was at once bedazzled and in a helpless muse.

"And darling," she rushed on, pointing her finger at him, and then pointing it again, sternly, "when we get married, and if the major is available, and especially if he's married again by that time, we want to invite him to our house often. Let's never let him go. He's one of the people we simply must hang onto."

"But if we're living on the Moon," Martin hazarded, taking the boldest conversational plunge he had ever managed with Barbara.

She interrupted him, her pixie dimples suddenly disappearing.

"Who wants to live on the Moon?" she said coolly. "Except for two or three days at a time like the major does?"

"That's right, who does?" said Martin, his eyes straying away from her image to rest on the blank wall beyond the telephone.

"Oh, now I've hurt your feelings! Darling, look at me." So he returned his gaze, feeling quite hopeless about the whole thing, and not even fooled by the worried tenderness which now ap-

peared in her eyes and lips. "Darling," she said softly, "we'll solve the problem, honest we will. Let's give it time."

"And now guess what? Major says he's going to call you and make arrangements for us to double-date with him and his girl the day you get out of the hospital!"

"It's not a hospital," Martin hurriedly interposed.

"Whatever it is. Anyway, you'll be well then —"

"I'm not sick!" yelled Martin.

She stared, sitting abruptly back from the audio. "No," she said icily. "I'll say you're not. But I won't get mad. It'll be too wonderful to see you again, dear." She blew him many kisses, smiled dazzlingly and was gone as he stupidly said good night.

III

The next day Martin was suspended in a device composed of several balloon-like structures which blew up and blew down as he breathed. The doctor in charge was making readings from an instrument which measured nervous energy input and output.

"The solar plexus is the key to the nervous and emotional health of mammalian life forms," the medical man told Martin. "The solar plexus — we call it the

celiac plexus — is a bundle of nervous and venous tissue which somehow manufactures nervous energy, which is then used by the body in its coordinative functions."

"Somehow?" said Martin.

The doctor nodded. "You've got a point," he admitted. "The best we can say is that the mechanism which stimulates the celiac into manufacturing nervous energy is the abdominal muscle called the diaphragm. When we breathe, the diaphragm massages the celiac; physical energy is transduced into nervous energy — somehow. Proper breathing therefore is essential to the production of proper amounts of nervous energy. Which is to say — what we've known all along from the year one — proper breathing is essential to our nervous and emotional health."

"A phone call for you, sir," an attendant said at this moment from the door.

"He'll take it out there, but give me a moment," said the doctor, frowning at the chart.

He continued: "On the Moon, Mr. Beales, some startling things happen to our nervous systems, our breathing, our emotions. At first, as you perhaps don't remember, the rate of breathing increases. Presumably the much lower gravitation and the consequent lessened demand on the

muscular organ creates some kind of emotional backlash which requires more nervous energy than on Earth; one may feel anxious, perhaps sad, or one may be driven into euphoria. Then, as time passes, the unconscious mechanisms of the body learn what is required of them on the Moon. There is less emotional disturbance and consequently a need for less emotional energy . . . if we consider emotions somewhat definable as the rate of flow of nervous energy. Breathing then slows down. Now when one returns to Earth —

"Breathing speeds up," said Martin, waiting for the axe to fall and at the same time glancing nervously at the waiting phone beyond the door.

The doctor smiled. "You look scared. Don't be. I'm giving you some good news. You were on the Moon just long enough for your breathing to come back up near Earth normal. On our scale of 1.0 your breathing stands at .9. By the time you leave here Saturday your breathing should be back up to normal. And that's very good. Now go talk to your girl." And he turned away, still smiling.

It wasn't Barbara. It was Major Whit Randolph. Randolph was wearing a splotchy green, a very gay smoking jacket, and fumes

were coming from a long black pipe in his mouth. Through the fumes, Martin saw a tintinnabula ball dancing on its air-needle and spinning randomly to give off its radioactive, edgy music. On an end-table was a half-finished glass of what looked like gin on the rocks, and on Randolph's knee sat a very pretty girl.

"Hi, old son," drawled Randolph. "Top o' the afternoon to you too. Martin, I want you to meet my girl. Claudina, curtsy for the Moon-Man."

Claudina blushed painfully, and caught Martin's eyes as if searching for help. She spread her tiny hands helplessly.

"I'm supposed to curtsy, sitting on his knee and captive to the United Nations," she said. "Anyway, I'm pleased. He — my — the major tells me you're rehabilitating from being on the Moon?"

"That's what the doctors like to call it," Martin told her, captured unavoidably and startlingly by the strange ivory purity of her skin. Cradle snatcher, he thought. And those big eyes, just like Barbara said, big dark brown eyes resting on his naively and a trifle sadly, so that he felt a tiny lump in his throat. What went on here, anyway? Just what?

"She's nice, huh, Martin?" Randolph murmured from some-

where in the background. "But she saw me first, believe me! So whaddya say? Did Barbara tell you? We're gonna take this town apart, level by level and all the way down to the sub-levels! Game?"

Martin tore his gaze away from Claudina. "Game for what?" he muttered.

Randolph laughed and pulled Claudina roughly to him so that she buried her head in his shoulder. "She is sweet, isn't she?" And his eyes beamed at Martin a sudden hard glimmer which was as suddenly lost in great fogging clouds of pipe smoke. Randolph's hand slowly stroked the pale ash of her hair. Then his voice came again, comfortably sure of itself.

"You heard me," he said. "Friday's the night. You'll be free of the Center, your girl will be free from her job, Claudina will be free, I'll be free, all free like birds. We're double-dating, old son, like Barbara told you.

"Now that Barbara," he rushed on, not allowing Martin to answer. "You picked yourself a real live one, Martin. I like her. And she's all set. Tubing in from Japan Friday. We're gonna ride the mare!"

Friday. Was it possible that Randolph didn't know he shouldn't leave here before Saturday? Martin started to bring that point up, then clamped his

lips as mutiny began. The doctor told him his breathing was already up to .9. To hell with the rest. He was feeling fit.

The idea of taking the town apart on his first return date with Barbara didn't appeal to Martin, but he was committed — in fact, hogtied. When he saw Barbara, though, his pulse jumped. To his astonishment, when he kissed her he didn't get dizzy and fall down.

"Whew!" she said, straightening her quarter-hat and leaning back in his arms so she could look up and closely inspect him. "They really did let you out of the cage, didn't they? Darling, you look wonderful."

He did look wonderful, nothing too startling except subdued blue. His dull black tagalong shoes went with his half-hat, the latter being the current affection of young married people in this period, and his bid to give an impression of maturity.

"Come on," he said, grinning down at her and slipping his arm around her bare waist, beyond which shimmery green Baghdads fell to hand-woven ankle armor. "We're meeting the major and his girl at Fifth Avenue Top Level — that's the name of the place so you can always find your way back in case you wanna get drunk there again."

"Me get drunk?" demanded Barbara, leaning toward him as if irresistibly drawn and kissing him soundly. That's ridiculous!"

They grabbed a yellocopter and programmed it for the Top. Randolph and Claudina were waiting for them at possibly the best table in the house. Randolph grinned widely and rushed toward them and pumped Martin's hand up and down. Then Randolph and Barbara threw their arms around each other and administered their social kiss. And so the evening began.

"This is all on me," Randolph said from the first. "My Code. Ah! The champagne. Ladies and gentlemen, Terra-Frenault, of the exact year 2000! Best year California ever had! Let's drink to that!"

Claudina sat gay and straight in a yard of very white lace edged with startling ribbons of red brocade, a veritable Valentine of a girl who immediately refused her first glass of champagne.

"Daddy doesn't like," she said. "Not until I'm twenty-one. The rules are very strict." Impudently she smiled upon her date. "Unless you can talk me into it."

Barbara laughed delightedly. "What a marvelous daddy!" she cried. Then she leaned toward Randolph and squeezed his hand. "Go ahead!" she coaxed. "See what you can think up."

TOUCH OF THE MOON

Randolph seemed taken aback. "Oh," said he. "You want me to help you break the family rules. Hmm. You're nineteen, aren't you? Nineteen Earth years. But you were on one of the Saturnian moons for at least a couple of its swings around the Big One, and that makes you twenty-one in my Code. Drink up!"

"Thank you, sir," said Claudina, flirting her eyes at him in a most exaggerated manner as she slowly brought the champagne to her lips.

And Martin, watching, saw the tiny white fingers holding the delicate stem tremble.

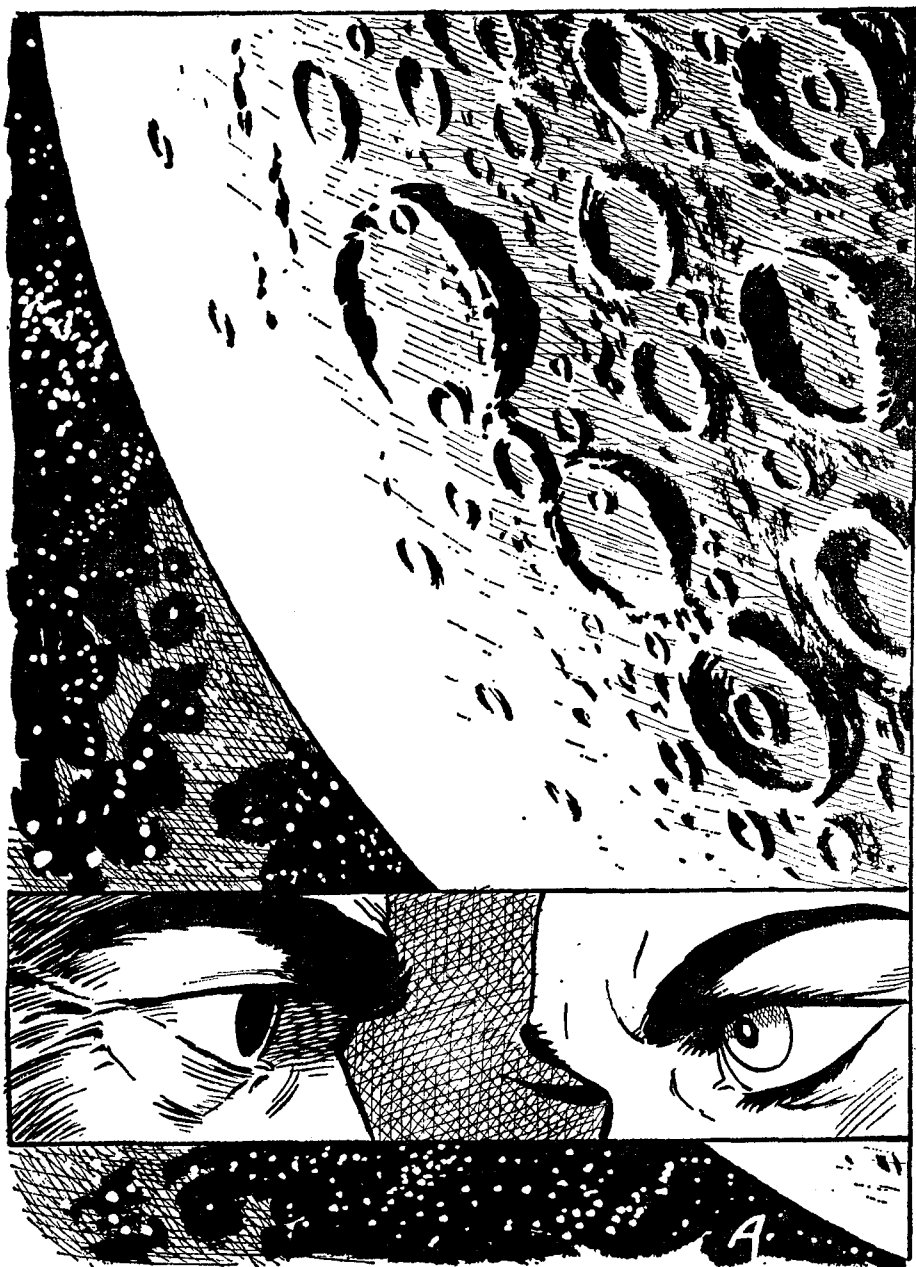
Now a waiter hovered about them, filling and refilling their glasses. There was much light laughter as the evening began to set in. There was a mutual admiration of the girls for each other's astounding hats. There was a broadly smiling camaraderie between Randolph and Martin, which on Martin's part was his way of indicating to everybody how wonderful it was to be free of the Training-In Center and to be an Earth-man again — a man among men.

IV

Just when the evening began to go wrong Martin would never really know.

After all, it couldn't have been

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the champagne, for who could argue with Terra-Frenault 2000? It couldn't have been the dinner, an elaborate procession of white wine sauces, Filet a la planete 101, Chicken a la "perp" planete Plymouth, all this fenced in or further embellished with aperitifs, breads, vegetables and deserts involving hot clam tomato bisque, la belle brioche, asparagus in vinaigrette, Ohio dandelion, ice creme de cacao, and this followed or augmented by brandy Alexanders. And it couldn't have been Martin's first dance with Barbara.

True, he was anxious about his first dance with Barbara, but it all went smoothly except that it was not the slow dreamy waltz he would have preferred with her for this intimate moment under the bombs. The other couples were jerkily lengthening and shortening shadows, shadows that often exploded as strange lights burst inches above their heads or almost in their faces. The tintinnabula, that marvelous instrumental invention of just the year before, was borrowing its full orchestral arrangement randomly from the heart of the uranium atom — and it was just too wild.

But not wild enough to make the evening go wrong.

Then Randolph was dancing with Barbara, and this time — somehow — the tintinnabula filled the glistening rainbow air with

the music one would find in the heart of water, and it was all so liquid and strange that something in Martin told him he should cry, and to cry out that it was all wrong, that something had gone wrong under the bombs, and there was only lovely Claudina floating dreamwise in his arms and he couldn't even tell her how he felt.

And he wasn't drunk. Of that he was sure.

"You're thinking," murmured Claudina, dreamwise and peaceful against his chest. "Not supposed to think, Martin. Just clink. Like a good ol' Earth machine."

Martin breathed. Was he breathing for Earth or the Moon? I'll breathe faster, he thought. He felt like he might be breathing at about .7. But maybe breathing faster wouldn't do it. The solar plexus was out of the habit of transducing enough nervous energy; no matter how fast the pumping diaphragm massaged it, it would refuse to cooperate. He shouldn't have left the hospital — not Friday, maybe not Saturday, maybe not even Sunday. When then?

Bombs burst, splattered light. Martin put the tip of his index finger under Claudina's chin and tilted her head up. One eye of Claudina winked red, another winked blue.

"Claudina," said Martin in a drum voice to get past the span-gled rainy cry of the tintinnabula, "you were on Enceladus, moon of Saturn. Right?"

"Right, sir!" She saluted smartly. "You've found me out, sir. I won't do it again, sir."

Martin nodded. "The major said it like a cuss-word the first time I met him," he said. "How long?"

"Too long, sir!"

"And you were probably at the City Training-In Center before I was. But before that, you must have done a lot of planet-hopping — Pallas, Juno, Vesta, Hermes, probably Mars, in ascending orders of gravitation. Finally Earth, and the Center."

"First the Moon," she answered, "and *then* Mars, and then Earth and the Center. Cost my daddy a pile of money, just getting me here on this dance floor."

She essayed a wide smile which crumbled into ruins. Her lips pulled down severely. Unkind lights danced between them to turn her saffron and blinking white.

She gasped, "Oh, Martin I hate to think about it, in a way. I disobeyed my daddy's orders and took a job on Enceladus. It took him a long time to find me — but it was beautiful, Martin, and romantic, whizzing around Saturn every day and a third. I wasn't very fit for Earth after that,

though, and the Government folders played that part down, about how it would affect you. Your nervous system mostly. I get very tired. I get so depressed."

She breathed for awhile, and they simply danced very slowly.

"I just haven't come out of it at all," she said. "The doctors say give it time — you know the doctors. Dr. Weller said I'm breathing just fine!"

She breathed hard against his neck, with a warm little puff of air that widened his eyes. "See?" She giggled a musical two-note which ended on a gasp. Worried, half-ashamed, her eyes sought his. They were hardly moving now. His arm tightened around her, halfway holding her up, and he remembered Mabel, who couldn't find a proper center of gravity. There was no such trouble with Claudina. He thought bleakly, Claudina, Claudina, we should be dancing on the Moon; it'd be a helluva lot less trouble.

"Martin —" Claudina spoke his name against his chest. Then her head came up, fringes of her pale hair having come loose from her coiffure and partly shadowing eyes that glowed and novaed from random bomb-lights. She said timidly, "Martin — Martin, if we were dancing on the Moon — you know, one of those beautiful places under the Moon — if we were it would be so nice."

"Yes, it would," he said steadily. "What about the major?"

"The major!" She laughed; her laugh was a dry sound, but full of air bubbles, a series of delighted gasps. "Oh, Martin," she gasped. "Let's just call the major an old friend of the family, shall we? A — a very old adored — friend."

She was still smiling, half-laughing, when they stopped dancing, as if by mutual consent, and wended back, through confetti streamers of brilliance seemingly borrowed from a distance star, toward their table with fingers loosely intertwined. They sat there, saying nothing, their glances occasionally touching, then wandering away toward the dancers where the major and Barbara were part of the moving, voluptuous, pristine scene.

Martin knew what had gone wrong, and it was very depressing.

He watched as Randolph and Barbara came back. Barbara leaned over and pressed her smooth face hard against his, then pressed his nose in with her finger.

"You and Claudina stopped dancing," she said. She took his hand. "Come on."

A real orchestra had taken the place of the tintinnabula. A thrumming, a humming, a very

adverse beat, called the splittable, underlay the surface gracefulness of an old waltz. Martin hesitated, then turned to Claudina to excuse himself. Claudina was drooping, her shoulders no longer erect, her face in shadow looking down at her drink.

The major, not yet seated, saw this, too. His face wrenched strangely. But Claudina raised her head, raised her glass. "I'm all right," she smiled. "Too much cerebration, not enough celebration. We could dance now, Major." She added, insisting. "I'm all right!"

"No," Randolph said shortly, sitting. "You stay there."

On the dance floor, Barbara wiped Martin's forehead with his wrist handkerchief. "We don't have to dance," she said worriedly. "It's just that we haven't danced three times already."

He smiled down at her. "How could we?" he asked lightly. "You and the major danced those dances. I think he likes you, Barbara-pal-lover-doll. I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't pay the tintinnabula operator to tune in on those radioactive numbers. They were wild!"

Her pixie dimples were doing their disappearing act. She said, "You never had any trouble keeping up with anything the tintinnabula handed out before. No matter what the randomness

factor. Are you trying to tell me — ?”

A colored globe burst between them. The contorting shadows of couples or triplets who elected to follow the fast, unpredictable, subterranean beat produced a weird stroboscopic effect which presented Barbara's face to Martin in jumping expressions which ranged from irritation, to resignation, to anger, to disappointment.

Martin said, "I'm only trying to tell you that the major likes you."

"And I like him!" she snapped. "So what?"

Martin said patiently, "He knew I shouldn't leave the Training-In Center until tomorrow, but he made arrangements for tonight." He paused and breathed for awhile. "You see what it's doing to me. By the way. How did the major like Japan?"

She was silent a moment. "Ah," she said. "So. The major was wining me, dining me, dancing me while I was working at a job that takes all the glucose out of my backbone. I think you and I better sit this one out. Come on, Martin, my beloved." She took his hand and attempted to draw him off the floor.

"No," he said stubbornly. "You don't get it yet, what he's doing to us. He's trying to break us up, Barbara. It's so obvious! Clau-

dina isn't his girl, she's just — somebody; somebody, an old friend of the family, a darling child he's worried about. He's throwing her at me so he can get you!"

He felt his voice rising. Almost out of nowhere he felt her cool finger across his lips. She whispered, "Don't you like her, Martin?"

"Who the hell could help but like her?" he almost yelled. "What's that got to do with it?"

"She was on a moon of Saturn, that's what," said Barbara through compressed lips. "Probably too long for her own good. Now come on." She renewed her grip on his hand, and they trailed back to the table.

Major Whit Randolph stood up as they approached, smiling. But his eyes were beaming directly at Martin; speculatively. As Martin approached the table, Randolph started to say something, but Martin felt his hand turning into a rock. He hit Randolph a solid, overhand blow on the jaw. The shock wave traveled through his numbed fist up his arm and into his shoulder and then, presumably, into his brain. He watched in surprised horror as the major, rather obviously, staggered back, then sank to the floor, shaking his head, and swearing under his breath, and working his jaw.

Some couples nearby came to their feet or turned their heads slightly for better peripheral vision. Three waiters, however, stopped what they were doing and unobtrusively ringed the scene and looked blandly off into nowhere.

Barbara stood helplessly over Randolph, shaking her head. "You shouldn't have done that, Martin," she said. "You just shouldn't." She stooped as if to help Randolph but he waved her savagely away and came up on one elbow.

"Never mind," he said. "Let him think he's got a punch."

A bomb skittered in from the heaving dance floor and burst near his face, lighting him in clown colors. It adequately showed eyes that were narrowed like gun emplacements in a fortress.

"Martin —" pacing his words as if each had a cannon behind it — "you called the turn. I did plot against you, from the first minute I saw you. You were my pigeon! Now why in hell don't you wake up? You'll never marry Barbara, because she'll never let herself get trapped away from Earth. And you can't live on Earth, any more than Claudina can. Now why in hell don't you go back to the Moon and take my daughter with you!"

Martin was staring hopelessly at the terrestrial fury of the bil-

lowing dance floor. He saw that Barbara was watching him, trying to smile, losing the smile, bringing the smile back again. Martin thought: The darling pixie dimples I will never kiss again. She's for Earth, and I'm for the Moon and the spaces beyond. And Claudina, too, trapped as he had been, only worse, on a Moon of Saturn. Darling Claudina, sweet, helpless Claudina, lost forever to Earth, spewed forever outward to walk the worlds of Canopus, Antares, Betelgeuse, Sirius.

V

The tips of their fingers intertwined, Claudina and Martin slowly entered the office of Dr. V. Weller, Director of the City Training-In Center. Weller was extremely cordial, all smiles, and held out chairs for them. Martin said, hesitantly, "I called you because I wanted to apologize for running off as I did, and I also wanted to settle my bill."

Weller was leaning forward behind his desk, full of repressed curiosity. "This isn't your girl," he said finally. "Not the one you came to see. Not our Claudina!" Avidly he studied Martin. "What happened?" he demanded, and added as an afterthought, and very politely, "You see, young

man, in our work we are still groping. We need all the case histories we can get. For our files. you see? Now. What happened?" With a strange tenacity the Director pumped both Martin and Claudina for even the personal details. Then his chair creaked as he threw back his head and laughed. The laugh, Martin noted sourly, was not a humorous one.

"You kids!" the director said. "So now you'll get married, set up housekeeping on the Moon and dance your lives away and call it love. Phh!"

Martin started to get up. Claudina tented four fingers on his knee and held him down.

She squinted at Weller, turning her head sidewise, in mock reproval. "Dr. Weller," she said firmly, "Martin and I are in love. My daddy wanted somebody nice to take care of me on the Moon, so he picked Martin, and . . . well, that's it. His plans worked out."

"Kind of a military campaign," grunted Weller.

"With flanking movements and rearguard action," nodded Claudina. "My daddy is a very smart man!"

"Obviously," said Weller sarcastically. "But who do you think was smarter. Mother Earth, that's who!"

"Mother Earth," said Martin, looking hopelessly at the door.

"Certainly. She sucked the nervous energies out of you two so you had to fall in each other's arms to stay on your feet. So that's love! Is that what you're going to use to build yourselves a happy life? Obviously it is."

His thin lips were pulled tight in a watchful grin. The two faces he looked at across his desk were crestfallen and startled. Then Martin's face began to turn red with confusion and anger. Weller's chair scuttled back as he came quickly around the desk and leaned against it and put his hand on Martin's shoulder, again keeping him down.

"I meant no harm," he said quickly. "On the contrary, I was hoping you could understand some of the forces that are working on you . . . as I am beginning to understand what forces work on me. You see —"

A strange agitation thinned his already thin face.

"You see, Martin, Claudina —" his forehead shone damply — "we who live here and stay here on Earth, contrary to our boasts, may be the real fools. I'm beginning to see that we are living through a very traumatic experience. This damned, heavy planet, pulling on our bones and our muscles and our organs and killing us years ahead of our time!"

He thrust out his antiseptic hand, where it quivered and shook minutely.

"Tell me, you two, what's making it shake like that? What's making me lean against this desk instead of standing up like a man? What sends me to bed three hours before bedtime and makes me creak when I get up? What makes me the irascible, unpleasant, arrogant pipsqueak that I am? What sucks the nervous energies out of *me*?"

He was grinding the words out and pushing himself to an upright position.

He dropped his hand, and his expression lightened, became even pleasant. "You see?" he

said. "Now you know why you're going back to the Moon. The Earth trauma. The Earth *trauma* — which you don't really know about until you've been out there and back."

Claudina and Martin were married on the Moon. One year later, Major Whit Randolph married Barbara. Four thousand years later their descendants swarmed the myriad worlds of the galaxy, of Canopus, Antares, Betelgeuse, Sirius. And all this time the matriachal Earth smiled, secretly proud of the devices she used to force her brood fluttering away from the nest.

— ROSS ROCKLYNNE

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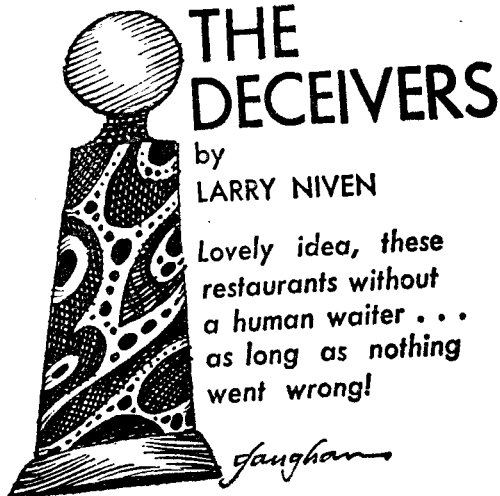
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A waiter came to meet them as they landed. It crossed the restaurant like a chess pawn come to life, slid to a graceful stop on the carport balcony, hesitated long enough to be sure it had their attention, then moved inside at a slow walking pace.

The sound of its motion was a gentle whisper of breeze from under the lip of its ground-effect skirt. It guided them across the floor of the Red Planet, between and around occupied tables, empty tables, tables which displayed decorative meats and bowls of flowers, and other whispering robot waiters. At a table for two on the far side of the room, it deftly removed one chair to accommodate Lucas Garner's travel chair. Somehow it had recognized Luke as a paraplegic. It held

the other chair for Lloyd Masney to sit down.

The murals on the restaurant walls were dull red and bright silver: a Ray Bradbury Mars, with the silver spires of an ancient Martian city nestling among red sands. A straight canal dwindled into the distance at both sides of the big room. Its silver waters actually crossed the floor and were in turn crossed by bridges. Attenuated, fragile Martians moved through the streets of the mural. Sometimes they looked curiously out at the customers, the human intruders in their make-believe world.

"Strange place," said Masney. He was a big, compact man with white hair and a bushy white moustache.

Luke didn't answer. When

Masney glanced up he was startled by his friend's malevolent expression. "What's wrong?" he asked, and turned to follow Luke's eyes.

Luke was glaring his extreme distaste at a target which could only have been the robot waiter.

The waiter was a standard make. Below a blank spherical head was a body cylindrical for most of its length. The arms it had used to adjust Masney's chair for him had already vanished into panels in its torso, to join other specialized arms and hands and interior shelves for carrying food. Like all the other waiters, it had been painted in an abstract pattern of dull red and bright silver to match the murals. The last foot of the robot's cylindrical torso was a short, flaring skirt. Like Luke's travel chair, the waiter moved on a ground-effect air cushion.

"What's wrong?" Masney repeated.

"Nothing," said Luke. He picked up the menu.

The robot waited for their orders. Motionless, with all its arms retracted, it had become a pop-art barber pole.

"Come on, Luke. Why were you looking at the waiter like that?"

"I don't like robot waiters."

"Mph? Why not?"

THE DECEIVERS

"You grew up with 'em. I didn't. I've never got used to them."

"What's to get used to? They're waiters. They bring food."

"All right," said Luke, studying the menu.

He was old. It was not spinal injury that had cost him the use of his legs these past ten years. Too many spinal nerves had worn out with age. A goatee had once adorned his chin, but now his chin was as bald as his brows and scalp. His face, Satanic in its wrinkled age, attracted instant attention, so that his every vagrant thought seemed exaggerated in his expression. The loose skin of his arms and shoulders half-hid the muscles of a wrestler: the only part of him that seemed young.

"Every time I think I know you," said Masney, "you surprise me. You're a hundred and seventy-four now, aren't you?"

"You sent me a birthday card."

"Oh, I can count. But I can't *grasp* it. You're almost twice my age. How long ago did they invent robot waiters?"

"Waiters weren't invented. They evolved, like computers."

"When?"

"You were just learning to spell when the first all-automated restaurant opened in New York."

Masney smiled and shook his head gently. "All that time, and you never got used to them. Conservative, that's you."

Luke put the menu down. "If you must know, something happened to me once in connection with robot waiters. I had your job about then."

"Oh?" Lloyd Masney was Superintendent of Police for Greater Los Angeles. He'd taken his desk from Luke after Luke had resigned to become an Arm of the UN, forty years back.

"I was just getting used to the job; I'd only held it a couple of years. When was it? I can't remember; around 2025, I think. They were just introducing automated restaurants. They were just introducing a lot of things."

"Weren't they always?"

"Naturally, naturally. Quit interrupting. Around ten that morning I took a cigarette break. I had the habit of doing that every ten minutes. I was thinking about getting back to work when Dreamer Glass walked in. Old friend, Dreamer. I'd sent him up for a ten-year stretch for false advertising. He'd just got out and he was visiting some old friends."

"With a firegun?"

Luke's smile was a startling flash of new white teeth. "Oh, no. Dreamer was a nice guy. Little

too much imagination, that's all. We put him away for telling television audiences that his brand of dishwashing liquid was good for the hands. We tested it, and it wasn't. I always thought he got too stiff a sentence, but — well, the Intent-to-Deceive laws were new then, and we had to bear down hard on the test cases so John Q would know we meant it."

"Nowadays he'd get the organ banks."

"We didn't put criminals in the organ banks in those days. I wish we'd never started."

"So Dreamer went to jail on my evidence. Five years later I was Superintendent. Another two years and he was out on parole. I was no busier than usual the day he showed up, so I dug out the guests' bottle, and we poured it in our coffee. And talked. Dreamer wanted me to fill him in on the last ten years. He'd been talking to other friends, so he knew something. But there were odd gaps that could have gotten him in trouble. He knew about the Jupiter probe, for instance, but he'd never heard of hard and soft plith."

"I wish I'd never mentioned robot restaurants."

"At first he thought I was talking about a bigger and better automat. Then when he got the idea, he was wild to see it."

"So I took him to lunch at the Herr Ober, which was a few blocks from the old Police Headquarters Building. Herr Ober was the first all-automated restaurant in Ellay. The only human beings involved were the maintenance crew, and they only showed up once a week. Everything else, from the kitchen to the hat-check girl, was machinery. I'd never eaten there — "

"Then how did you know so much about it?"

"We'd had to chase a man in there a month earlier. He'd picked up a kid for ransom, and he still had her for a hostage. At least, we thought he did. Another story. Before I could figure how to get at him, I'd had to study the Herr Ober top to bottom." Luke snorted. "Look at that metal idiot. He's still waiting for our order. You! Get us two Vurguuz martinis." The pop-art barber pole rose an inch from the floor and slid off. "Where was I?"

"Oh, yeah. The place wasn't crowded, which was a break. We picked a table, and I showed Dreamer how to punch the summons button to call a waiter. We already called them waiters, but they didn't look anything like the ones here. They were nothing but double-decker serving trays on wheels, with senses and mo-

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tors and a typewriter all packed into one end."

"Ran on wheels, too, I'll bet."

"Yah. Noisy. But in those days it was impressive. Dreamer was bug-eyed. When that animated tray came for our orders he just stared. I ordered for both of us.

"We downed our drinks and had another round. Dreamer told me about the Advertisers' Club that somehow got formed in his cell block. The cigarette men could have controlled it to the eyes, there were so many of them, but they couldn't agree on anything. What they really wanted to do was form a convict's lobby in Washington."

The waiter appeared with the martinis.

"Anyway, we had our drinks and ordered. Identical meals, because Dreamer still wasn't capable of making a decision. He kept staring around, grinning.

"The waiter brought us shrimp cocktails. While we were eating, Dreamer tried to pump me on who might have the advertising concession on the robots. Not on the restaurant, but on all the automatic machinery. There he was, knowing nothing about computers, but all ready to go out and sell them. I tried to tell him he'd picked a good way to get back in Quentin, but he wouldn't listen.

"We finished the shrimp, and

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the waiter brought us two more shrimp cocktails. Dreamer said, 'What's this?'

"I must have typed wrong," I told him. "I wanted two lunches, but the damn thing is bringing us two lunches each."

"Dreamer laughed. 'I'll eat them both,' he said, and did. 'Ten years is a long time between shrimp cocktails,' he said.

"The waiter took our empty cups away and brought us two more shrimp cocktails.

"This is too much of a good thing," said Dreamer. "Where do I go to talk to the manager?"

"I told you, it's all automatic. The manager's a computer in the basement."

"Does it have an audio circuit for complaints?"

"I think so."

"Where do I find it?"

"I looked around, trying to remember. 'Over there. Past the payment counter. But I don't —'

"Dreamer got up. 'I'll be right back,' he said.

"He was, too. He came back within seconds, and he was shaking. 'I couldn't get out of the dining room,' he told me. 'The payment counter wouldn't let me by. There was a barrier. I tried to give it some money, but nothing happened. When I tried to go over the barrier, I got an electric shock!'

"That's for deadbeats. It won't let you by until you pay for your lunch. You can't pay until you get a bill from the waiter."

"Well, let's pay and get out. This place scares me."

"So I pushed the summons button, and the waiter came. Before I could reach the typer it had given us two more shrimp cocktails and moved away.

"This is ridiculous," said Dreamer. "Look, suppose I get up and stand around at the other side of the table. That way you can reach the typer when it delivers the next round, because I'll be blocking it from leaving."

"We tried it. The thing wouldn't come to our table until Dreamer sat down. Didn't recognize him standing up, maybe. Then it served two more shrimp cocktails, and Dreamer got up quick and moved behind it. I had my hands on the typer when it backed off and knocked Dreamer flat.

"He got so mad, he stood up and kicked the first waiter that came by. The waiter shocked him good, and while he was getting up the thing tossed him a printed message to the effect that robot waiters were expensive and delicate and he shouldn't do that."

"That's true," Masney said, deadpan. "He shouldn't."

"I'd have been helping him

do it, but I wasn't sure what those machines would do next. So I stayed in my seat and planned what I'd do to the guy who invented robot waiters, if I ever got out of there to track him down.

"Dreamer got up shaking his head. Then he started trying to get help from the other diners. I could have told him that wouldn't work. Nobody wanted to get involved. In the big cities they never do. Finally one of the waiters shot a slip at him that told him to stop bothering the other diners, only it was more polite than that.

"He came back to our table, but this time he didn't sit down. He looked scared. 'Listen, Garner,' he said, 'I'm going to try the kitchen. You stay here. I'll bring help.' And he turned and started away.

"I yelled, 'Come back here! We'll be all right if — ' But by that time he was out of ear-shot, heading for the kitchen door. I know he heard me shout. He just didn't want to be stopped.

"The door was only four feet tall, because it was built for robots. Dreamer ducked under it and was gone. I didn't dare go after him. If he made it, fine, I'd have help. I didn't think he would.

"There was one more thing I

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wanted to try. I pushed the summons button, and when the waiter came with two more shrimp cocktails I typed 'Phone' before it could get away."

"To phone Headquarters? You should have tried that earlier."

"Sure. But it didn't work. The waiter scooted off and brought me another shrimp cocktail.

"So I waited. By and by everyone disappeared, and I was alone in the Herr Ober. Whenever I got hungry enough I'd eat some crackers or a shrimp cocktail. The waiter kept bringing me more water and more shrimp cocktails, so that was all right.

"I left notes on some tables, so that when the dinnertime crowd showed up they'd be warned. But the waiters removed the notes as fast as I wrote them. Keeping things neat. I quit that and waited for rescue.

"Nobody came to rescue me. Dreamer never came back.

"Six o'clock, and the place filled up again. Along about nine, three couples at a nearby table started getting an endless supply of canapes Lorenzo. I watched them. Eventually they got so mad that the six of them circled the waiter and picked it up. The waiter spun its wheels madly, and then it shocked them and they dropped it. It fell on one

man's foot. Everyone in the place panicked. When the dust cleared there were only the seven of us left.

"The others were trying to decide what to do about the guy with his foot under the waiter. They were afraid to touch the waiter, of course. It wouldn't have taken my order, because I wasn't at one of its tables, but I got one of the others to type an order for aspirin, and off it went.

"So I got the six of them back to their table and told them not to move. One of the girls had sleeping pills. I fed three to the guy with the smashed foot.

"And so we waited."

"I hate to ask," said Masney, "but what were you waiting for?"

"Closing time!"

"Oh, of course. Then what?"

"At two o'clock our waiters stopped bringing us shrimp cocktails and canapes Lorenzo and brought us our bills. You wouldn't believe what they charged me for all those shrimp cocktails We paid our bills and left, carrying the guy with the smashed foot. We took him to a hospital, and then we got to a phone and called everybody in sight. Next day the Herr Ober was closed for repairs. It never reopened."

"What about Dreamer?"

"He's one reason the place never reopened. Never found him."

"He couldn't just disappear."

"Couldn't he?"

"Could he?"

"Sometimes I think he must have taken advantage of the publicity. Started life over somewhere else, with no prison record. And then I remember that he went into a fully automated kitchen, through a door that wasn't built for humans. That kitchen machinery could handle full-sized sides of beef. Dreamer obviously wasn't a robot. What would the kitchen machinery take him for?"

Masney thought about it.

It came to Masney as they were finishing desert.

"Mmmmb!" he said. "Mmmmb!" And he swallowed frantically. "You fink! You were sent straight from Homicide branch to superintendent. You never had anything to do with the Intent to Deceive Branch!"

"I thought you'd catch that."

"But why would you lie?"

"You kept bugging me about why I hated robot waiters. I had to say something."

"All right. You conned me. Now, why do you hate robot waiters?"

"I don't. You just happened to look up at the wrong time. I was thinking how silly our waiter looked in his ground-effect miniskirt." LARRY NIVEN

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Galaxy Bookshelf

by ALGIS BUDRYS

What is the matter with the times? Children no longer respect their parents, Church and State are at an intersection, and at times it is apparently bad to be against sin and for motherhood. What is the matter with the times? Well, perhaps it would be useful to ask, "What is the matter with me?"

To look at me, you would never know the seething inside. I'd imagine that the same is true of you, but I can't tell by looking at you. Nevertheless, I take it on faith that you're like me — that it would take days and days to tell your life story the way it should be told, slashed with recollections and injuries, dotted with moments of utter clarity, jammed with hard lessons learned on the instant. I don't believe that such a thing as a true biography of anyone grown up is even remotely possible. If we tried to grasp all the things that were important to us, and if we tried to tell someone each and every one of them in the correct order and with logic, we never would get past recounting the first hour of our first conscious day.

We're chaos inside; a web of interlaced reactions, memories of actions, wants, needs, titillations, passions, horrors . . . I seem to remember the hard lessons very vividly.

Joy takes just a little more work to recollect. I hope it's not that way for you, though I suspect it is.

What, then, wouldn't I do for some small comfort? I could use an indication that someone knows my sorrow. I'd have some hope tomorrow will be better. And you?

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This is a review of a book called *Dangerous Visions*, edited to inflame by Harlan Ellison. Published by Doubleday, at \$6.95, it contains over a quarter of a million words in the form of thirty-three stories by thirty-two science-fiction and fantasy writers of one kind or another. Several of them are science-fiction and fantasy writers you never heard of, but most of them are very familiar names.

Ellison says:

"What you hold in your hands is more than a book. If we are lucky it is a revolution.

"This book, all two hundred and thirty-nine thousand words of it, the largest anthology of speculative fiction ever published of *all original* stories, and one of the largest of *any* kind, was constructed along specific lines of revolution. It was intended to shake things up. It was conceived out of a need for new horizons, new forms, new styles, new challenges in the literature of our times. If it was done properly, it will provide these new horizons and styles and forms and challenges. If not, it is still one helluva good book full of entertaining stories."

You should buy this book immediately. If necessary, you should also spend the cab fare needed to get to the nearest bookstore. You should do this because

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this is a book that knows perfectly well that you are seething inside. It represents the equivalent of a warm tender touch in the dark, just when you thought you were trapped in here with strangers.

Your problem is going to be that, shortly after you make this discovery, another hand will reach you from another direction. And then another. And another. In a very short while, you are going to be in the middle of the damnest melee of would-be comforters, and it is only to be hoped that, after shaking off the experience, you are not driven to overcompensate by fleeing forthwith to a nunnery for the remainder of your natural life.

What am I talking about? Well, to begin with, it sounds as if I'm talking about a great many things. But what I mean to say by them is that we are all human, and by the same token we are all to some extent frustrated. We have wanted things that we have not been able to get, and no matter what face we put on this when we go about our daily doings, the memory is blood red and clear in our minds inside. Somehow, in many cases, no amount of joy can overlay or dilute this.

We have been robbed, cheated, lied to and betrayed. It's no comfort to be told that this is mere-

ly the result of the nature of the world and of human society. That happens to people in textbooks. What has happened to us has happened to us. It has happened to me, it has probably happened to you because you are like me, and it has most assuredly happened to Harlan Ellison.

Harlan is articulate, though not always coherent. He is vastly energetic. He is a promotional genius. And in consequence we have this book, which apparently represents a gathering of people who are of like mind with Harlan, who may be people like me, and may be people like you.

Since a book cannot be a revolution, no matter what Harlan says, but can only reflect one, and since a book of fiction can provide nothing, but can only evoke responses to the things that it reflects, it follows that the revolution Harlan speaks of has been pre-existing within the writers he brings us here, is going on in the field in which these writers work — in fact, is going on in the large world of which science-fiction is an intrinsic part — and may very well be going on inside you.

Did you know?

The immediately above is not as cute a question as it may at first glance seem. Harlan by habit and practice continually proclaims that he is blasting

down the walls and smashing the barriers. This time he purports to have brought an entire wrecking crew with him. It is my theory that all of his hooah about dynamite and explosions is in fact Harlan's way of saying gently: "Look out your windows." If we take it like that, then what is it that waits for us outside our windows, and what is the vantage point from which we peek out through them?

The authors in this book would grace just about any table of contents they happened to appear upon. Lester del Rey, Robert Silverberg, Frederik Pohl, Philip José Farmer, Miriam Allen deFord, Robert Bloch, Brian W. Aldiss, a chap named Howard Rodman, which is called "The Niven, Fritz Leiber, Joe L. Hensley, Poul Anderson, David R. Bunch, a man named James Cross, a lady named Carol Emshwiller, Damon Knight, Theodore Sturgeon, Larry Eisenberg, Henry Slesar, Sonya Dorman, a fellow named John T. Sladek, Jonathan Brand, Chris Neville, R. A. Lafferty, J. G. Ballard, John Brunner, Keith Laumer, Norman Spinrad, Roger Zelazny, Samuel R. Delany and, somewhere in the middle but not least, Harlan Ellison.

That's a hefty crew. Now one question one could usefully ask is what has brought them all to-

gether here, besides Harlan's persistent energy?

Well, to some, the reason is not connected with this book's advance notices among sf writers. That would be James Cross and John T. Sladek. Their two stories were simply submitted by the authors' literary agent when Harlan got desperate for material. Cross's "The Doll House" was written pretty much to one of *Weird Tales'* formulas. Not that I think Cross decided to write a story to fit a market that's been out of business for many many years. It's just one of the standard fantasy notions, Cross did a pretty good job of writing it up, and when he was done he was finished. This person is not in revolt.

John T. Sladek doesn't do a hell of a lot better in that wise. He says that the machine will reduce us all to ineffectual unthinkers. Well, I hope not, but whether one hopes not or not this is not an exactly new idea, nor is it newly proposed, nor does it go to any new place.

Harlan, standing back a little, would know that. He would also know that the story by Howard Rodman, which is called "The Man who Went to the Moon — Twice," is a refiguration of Robert Heinlein's twenty-year-old story, "Columbus Was a Dope," and that it is science fiction only by courtesy now, the same as it

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was when Heinlein wrote it, but it isn't by Heinlein, and it's twenty years old. What it says, by the way, is that progress happens, but people find ways to make it commonplace.

I think that's a valid premise. I also think a lot of the cheaper rebellion in this book is created by a deliberate unawareness of progress, or an unwillingness to admit that progress can happen, because if progress can happen then one ought to be working a little bit harder to keep up with it or participate in it. It is much more pleasant simply to continue to spiral inward on the same old involution, the way Philip José Farmer does with "Riders of the Purple Wage." If you are wondering how it is possible to write more and more about less and less, Farmer can show you how to pile it higher and higher. From the first clue, of the free associational title which will require some piece of blatant twisting somewhere in the story to justify it, to the last line, which by no means redeems the expenditure of thirty thousand words, this satire on the father figure in Heinlein's stories, or this satire on Philip José Farmer, is the kind of exercise in self-indulgence you are going to get from some of the rebellious writers in our community if you tell them that all

judgment will be suspended this one time.

This process becomes even more obvious than it could have been. Each story is preceded by an editorial introduction, in which Harlan personalizes the daylights out of the author and his story. The story in turn is followed by an auctorial afterword, in which the author explains why he did what he just did. In some cases, you learn once more that the story now in your mind can not quite be what's in the writer's mind. In some cases, you learn that the writer is serious, thoughtful and educated. (You can also usually guess that from the story.) And in some cases, you can watch some pretty big people indeed go crawling on their bellies like reptiles as they bend everything in sight to prove that they, they too, are "controversial," while their stories give them the lie.

And then we get "Faith of Our Fathers" by Philip K. Dick. This story is controversial as hell. It is controversial because the editor in his forward does everything in his power to make you believe that it is deliberately written while the author was up on drugs. A careful study of the wording indicates that he might not have been, which is just as well for his general welfare, I guess. But it is a fact, as some of you might

recall from *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, that Dick knows his hallucinogens very well, and that perhaps as a result of this he also writes very well about hallucinatory situations. In the case of *Three Stigmata*, superbly well; in the case of this story, he is somewhere beyond that point.

He is to the point where he makes sense only to himself. This is a shame because the first three-quarters of this story appear to be very good. But if this is rebellion — and I suppose it is — in fact, it certainly is — it is, again, involuntal.

“The Jigsaw Man” by Larry Niven is an example of another kind of non-revolutionary revolutionary story — the one with the false basic premise. It says that if organ transplants turn out to be an effective therapeutic technique, then the demand will rise so high that we will begin legally killing people in great numbers in order to collect materials to meet it. The death penalty, Niven says, might very well be applied in the end to a man who in the space of two years willfully drove through a total of six red lights and exceeded local speed limits no less than ten times, once by as much as fifteen miles per hour.

The story begins as a well writ-

ten hunk of action, has a number of emotionally effective moments, and winds up being almost purely polemical. Niven has told us an interesting story only up to the point where he had us hooked. Then he begins to lecture. His afterword takes off all the wraps and simply hammers away at these same points rather more energetically. He seems to think that this terrible thing could happen very soon. That it could really happen. But it seems to me that for it to be happening in any foreseeable extension of our present culture, we would today have to be draining the blood of all those about to die anyhow — since there is a serious shortage of whole blood, plasma and other blood fractions. But we are not doing so. In the face of an urgent necessity, we are still bumbling along with the same old stupid, and sometimes lethal, sloppy collection system.

It also seems to me that we should be doing something about making donation to “eye” and “ear” banks compulsory under certain circumstances. Too, in a very few more years, some respectable researchers predict and partly demonstrate, we will have beaten the sloughing problem, and therefore we ought to be stockpiling skin for grafts. We can use all the raw human bone we can get. But where are the charn-

el houses? No, in our culture you can kill 'em but you can't eat 'em, and there is no sign that this is about to change. I think Niven looks a little ridiculous this time. It may be that he's right, but there's no sign of it within the context of his own work here, which is neither good lecture nor good story.

“Eutopia,” by Poul Anderson, telegraphs. It's about one of the stock controversial subjects, and at first appears to have been well and thoughtfully written. But having telegraphed, it leaves itself free for examination as a hunk of story construction. And, as Fred Pohl said to me of one of mine in years past: “This is the kind of story in which the writer holds all the cards, and then he lays them down one at a time.” And this is true. I believe this story is not written as well as Anderson would have handled a similar plot if he hadn't had this college-controversial ending to look forward to. That's a pretty tendentious judgment, because God knows what Anderson would really have done. But off his record Anderson does better as a technician and as a storyteller when he is not also attempting to shock people. I think he could do best by contenting himself to lead people to think, as he has been doing for many years

now. That's usually shock enough.

But by now you are wondering why I told you to buy a book full of stories that I don't hold with. Well, in the first place, I do hold with them, every one of them, even the bad ones, even the two(!) by David Bunch, because at least the appearance of this book indicates that there is some kind of ferment and that there are people willing to endorse it. We can take it as a matter of course that, like every revolution, this one has members who must be weeded out when success is achieved. But my other reason for telling you to buy this book is that it contains a number of extremely good stories.

The best of them, the very best, one of the finest short stories I have ever read is “Sex and/or Mr. Morrison” by Carol Emshwiller. It is a love story. It is not a story about any known form of physical sexual activity. It is a love story independent of the well known fact that there are two physical sexes. It is a story about love, pure, and the frustration and redemption that it offers. It is, though you might argue, about little commonplace things that really do happen to you and me every day. “Sex and/or Mr. Morrison” is about the things that actually make things work.

“If All Men Were Brothers,

Would You Let One Marry Your Sister?" by Theodore Sturgeon, on the other hand, is about a very big subject. It's about incest, and it is just plain terrible. It is a compendium of all the storytelling errors that Sturgeon avoided so brilliantly in writing *Some of Your Blood*. If he had to save them up someplace in order to write that latter novel, then reading this story is not too high a price to pay. But it's interesting that *Some of Your Blood* is a straight novel, and it is here in the liberated "speculative fiction" format that Sturgeon falls down so badly. He falls down because he is not talking about the way the world is. He is talking about the way the world feels. And actually he is talking about the way he says the world feels. Since he falls into the lecture form very soon, he is also trying to tell us what to do about the way the world feels. He is manipulating what he should be observing. And unfortunately for him, he is in the same book with "Sex and/or Mr. Morrison," which if it is like anything that has gone before, is like Sturgeon.

There is a whole clutch of Stories about God, as you might have expected. There is Lester del Rey's "Evensong." There is "Faith of Our Fathers." There is a plain tale plainly told, "En-

counter With a Hick" by Jonathan Brand (and by extension in this same classification there is Fritz Leiber's "Gonna Roll the Bones," "Lord Randy, My Son" by Joe L. Hensley, and John Brunner's sophomoric "Judas").

"Gonna Roll the Bones" and "Lord Randy, My Son" are both rather effective stories, outside the Judeo-Christian format, both strongly founded in folk beliefs. "Gonna Roll the Bones" has to do with the devil, gambling, wives and the hearth that is also a furnace, all good solid recurring symbols in folklore, and all very nicely utilized by Leiber in an effective and utterly noncontroversial story. "Lord Randy, My Son" is about the neglected "retarded" child, whose psionic abilities are such that he is going to be most certainly a new Messiah.

(Hensley, by the way, is made to sound like a boob and a boor in Ellison's ingenuously affectionate introduction. Hensley, a great gentleman, would never suggest to Harlan that his mouth has run away with him).

The overt God stories are not so hot, even considering that Lester del Rey wrote "Evensong," which is about the inherently incredible situation in which God appears as the leading character in a science-fiction story. There are some stories that can't be told, even when the author, editor

and publisher are all willing. Let Damon Knight, represented here by an old story out of his trunk, explain to you how this works:

"The question asked in the story ('Shall the Dust Praise Thee?' in which Jehovah finds this message on a wasted Earth: 'We were here. Where were you?') is a frivolous one to me, because I do not believe in Jehovah, who strikes me as a most improbable person; but it seems to me for someone who believes, it's an important question."

Most of the stories in this book serve only as examples. That's okay, because some of them work — one or two of them, and that's enough. Sturgeon contributes to the Emshwiller.

It's Kris Neville's "From the Government Printing Office" that rounds out the book. Not that there aren't some other good stories in it, many worth reading. The Neville just happens to touch on what this book, some of these stories, and what the whole "revolution" is about. You might call it "informational deprivation" or a "credibility gap" between this generation and the past.

Not to put too fine a point on it, the Neville is about a time when kids are raised in accordance with a pedagogical program designed to create more scientists. This involves deliberate cruelty,

almost pathological misunderstandings and the withholding of honest answers; the fobbing off of fabrications such as folk-tales and folk-wisdom on the inquiring child, and the stunting of his attempts at self-expression. It also happens to be based on the results of real biographical studies into the early lives of top researchers in our day. As a general thing, these studies tend to show, the people who have made our world were made by what another day may well call madness; before we have *that* other day, we might have a few intervening ones. (We get no answers, neither here, nor in anyone's studies, nor within ourselves, to such questions as whether a similar inquiry into the childhood of the average working stiff, science-fiction writer or movie star would not reveal the same or similar madness. I think it might).

There are some who say the problem has been brought to a peculiar point of acuity by the fact that we have now matured the first complete generation born into a world that could wink out, and knows it. I believe that, but it's not important to the point here, which is that like all revolutions toward the future, this one is buried hip and thigh in the past . . . in the mad past, which gives birth to a mad new day.

ALGIS BUDRYS

GALAXY BOOKSHELF

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THE WORLD

*Helpless, Thorinn watched his
murderers end his life — and
found a new one underground!*

Illustrated by *ginghise*



AND THORINN

by DAMON KNIGHT



I

In the days of King Alf, there was a house in windy Hovenskar at the hub of the world, where the sky turns round the Pipe of Snorri. The house was of sods, with a stone roof, for no other sort of roof can stand against the winds that blow, this

way and that way, over cold Hovenskar as the sky turns.

Now Hovenskar is like a yellow bowl, and from one side of it to the other side is three days' journey. Long is the spoon with which the gods eat porridge from that bowl! To the north can be seen the half of Snorri's Pipe, a gray-green column three leagues in

thickness, yet so tall that it seems to prick the sky like a needle; and around it the sky swings, half light and half dark. Therefore at high noon there is an eye of darkness peering over the rim of Hovenskar, and at midnight an eye of brightness. And the wind blows from the dark to the light, this way and that way over Hovenskar.

In this unlucky place, in the days of King Alf, lived a man called Goryat and his three sons, who were outlaws driven out of Kjelsland. Goryat and the two elder sons were gray-skinned Lowlanders, four ells tall, with tusks like daggers; but the youngest son was pink as a Highlandman, and he stood no taller than Goryat's belt-buckle. Nonetheless he was sturdy and quick and could jump higher than his own head. Thus he was called Thorinn, which is a kind of flea.

Now it happened on the last day of King Alf (when a roof-tile dashed his brains out) that for thousands of leagues, even unto the land of the Skryllings, the earth became flat where it had formerly risen and arose where it had been flat. Rivers left their banks, lakes became marshes, the air was one black scream of birds, and everywhere cook-pots rolled out of kitchens, while the cooking wenches tumbled after.

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But of all this the four of Hovenskar knew nothing. They knew only that Snorri's Pipe had begun to roar, with a sound that thrummed in the bones and could not be shut out, though they stopped their ears with their fingers; that their bodies had turned light, as in a dream; that there was an earth-shock that made men and horses dance on the ground like lice on a griddle, and that bits of the sky were falling like frost-flakes.

Before they could gather their wits about them, one of the horses, a mare with foal, had broken her leg in the peat bog, and the rest were scattering up the high curve of the valley, from whence it was half a day's work to drive them home again.

Now this was a weighty matter. It grew weightier still on the second day, when the other four mares went dry. Goryat took the finest of the remaining horses, a stallion of two summers, three ells high at the shoulder, and sacrificed him to Snorri. But the demon did not leave off roaring. Instead, as Goryat finished his prayers, there was a second earth-shock, and from the well nearby came the crack of stone breaking, and all the water ran away into the Underworld, leaving the well dry as a skull.

Then the two elder sons urged

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their father to leave Hovenskar and fare southward, but the old man, whose hand was still heavy though his mane had turned white as frost, would have none of it. "In all the Midworld there is no safety for me or those of my blood save in Hovenskar," said Goryat to his sons. "Nor may Thorinn leave, for I have sworn by Wit and Bal to keep him." Thus did the two sons learn from their father's lips for the first time, though in truth it was plain to be seen, that Thorinn was no blood brother of theirs.

"But if we sacrifice another horse, we may go empty-bellied through the winter," said the eldest son, whose name was Withinga.

"Moreover, it's plain enough that Snorri wants no horses." Thus spoke the second son, whose name was Untha. "Is he the demon of waters, or not? When the horse was offered, he was vexed and broke our well."

"We must give him something better," said Withinga.

"Idle is boasting when the hands are empty," Goryat answered. "What, must we fare to Skryllingsland and bring back a sacrifice?"

"Not so far as that," Withinga said. And he pointed his chin toward the hillside, where Thorinn was leading the horses to the nearest spring.

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Goryat said then, "Would you make me an oath-breaker? I tell you, I swore to keep the boy until Snorri takes him."

Untha rose and pointed at the black mouth of the well. "Then give him to Snorri."

So it was agreed. When Thorinn came down, suspecting nothing, they said to him, "Go into the well, see whether it can be mended." Then when he was in the well, they pulled up the bucket and covered the well-mouth with a great stone and prayed over it.

The Flea lay upon his back, hands behind his head, one knee cocked over the other. The blades of the yellow grass formed a wall close around him, shielding his body from the wind that rustled overhead. Through half-shut eyes he could see the wavering patch of brightness that was the sky. Drowsy scents of grass and blossoms were in his nostrils, mingled with the faint but pungent smell of horse that clung to his leather garments. He could hear the stiff grass-blades crackling as insects crawled among them, the snort and stamp of the horses farther up the hillside and, more distantly, the unending drone of Snorri's Pipe.

Deliciously hidden and at ease, more than half asleep, he was daydreaming of distant moun-

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tains and brightly dressed people, when a new sound roused him.

He started up on one elbow and listened. There it came again. He pivoted with one hand on the matted grasses, sprang easily to his feet. Far below, over the thousand moving waves of yellow grass, he could see Goryat's stead-ing in the bright half of the valley — the house with its roof of gray stone and its thread of smoke bent by the wind, the horse barn, the meathouse, the tanyard, the well, all tiny as pebbles. Near the house a mannikin stood; its mane was only a dot of yellow. The arms were lifted; it shook a fist. After a second the hail came again: . . . *ooorriii* . . .

Thorinn waved his arms in answer. The tiny figure below gestured with one hand, then turned away. It was already loping slowly toward the house when the sound arrived: . . . *ooome dowww*

They had thought of some other task for him. That was only to be expected.

Breathing the keen wind, Thorinn forgot all disappointment as he raised his head. It was mid-morning. Where the tip of the Pipe touched the sky beyond the valley rim the dome was split by a clean arc that soared high over Thorinn's head, dividing the sky into pale light and greenish darkness. Half the valley below was daylit. The other half lay still

in deep night, pricked here and there by the witchfires of fallen sky-stuff. Over in the peat-bog, wisps of night-mist were rising like ghosts; dew still sparkled in the grass along the daylight edge.

As the day wore on, the arc in the sky would creep around the rim of the valley. One could almost see it move. Thorinn had lain many an hour on the wind-swept hill, watching it until, often as not, he fell fast asleep, and the horses roamed where they listed.

Tits and fieldfares were busy in the cropped grass around the spring, quarreling and chirruping over the bits of grain they found in the horse droppings. Hawks were awheel over the high rim; but in the dark side, Thorinn knew, owls and nightjars were stirring. Northward from Hovenskar, it was said, there were night creatures that never ventured into daylight, but followed the darkness eternally, around and around. Some day Thorinn would go and hunt them. Goryat would give him leave when he was a man. The world was good, though Snorri rumbled.

Above him near the outcrop and the spring, the eleven giant horses turned their heads alertly. Thorinn filled his lungs and shouted. "Ho, Biter! Ho, Stone-head!" The horses snorted and tossed their manes; Stonehead, the old stallion, showed his wick-

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ed span-long teeth. Thorinn bent his knees, leaped over the grasstops, came down two ells higher on the slope, leaped again. The horses, pretending fright, wheeled and lumbered away. Thorinn's legs pumped furiously; he bounded, leaped like a grasshopper after the soaring horses. He passed two stragglers, nervous young colts. The earth trembled, bouncing him higher. Blood burned in his veins; the wind whipped his cheeks, made his eyes smart with tears. Head down, his massive hindquarters bunching like fists, old Stonehead flew before. Stones and clots of turf spattered Thorinn like hail. He was flying, lungs afire. Into — the yellow — sea — and out. Ahead the stallion's round eye glinted. The old horse turned, laboring up-slope. In two breaths Thorinn was beside him; a final leap, and the rough mane was against his face, his arms and legs gripping the shaggy neck, while the world wheeled.

Winded and utterly happy, Thorinn clung to the stallion's neck. After a plunge or two, earth and sky steadied around him. Obedient to his will, the old stallion, who could have flung him five ells and broken his back if he chose, stood snorting and trembling. Thorinn reached up, grasped a thick hairy ear at
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the root, pulled gently. The stallion dipped his huge head, turned and sprang.

The other horses, standing at gaze a few hundred ells away, fell upward into distance. The steep yellow bowl of the valley came plunging up, the wind whined in his ears — down, with a bone-breaking jolt, another leap — down, another. Bounding below, the tiny shapes of the houses grew larger with each dizzy arc. The stallion's neck strained against Thorinn's cheek; they were flying like the wind; they would leap and never come down!

The slope grew shallow; the hillside was behind them and the gray figure beside it. Thorinn recognized Withinga, tall as the house-eaves, in his stained leather jerkin and his belt studded with span-wide metal bosses.

Obedient to Thorinn's touch, Stonehead planted his hooves and slid to a bone-jarring halt. While Withinga watched sourly, Thorinn vaulted to the ground, slapped the old stallion's rump. Stonehead snorted, wheeled and bounded away toward the distant shapes of the other horses high on the hill.

"Do you want to break your neck, Flea?" Withinga asked, taking a ponderous stride forward.

"When Snorri calls, man must

answer," said Thorinn. He stepped back, half expecting a blow, but Withinga only stared at him for a moment, then said: "So it is. Come, the Old Man has a task for you."

Thorinn followed him around the moss-grown sods of the house. Under the weight of the roof, the sod walls had bulged year by year until the house lost all its squareness and was shaped like a cheese. In the dooryard beyond, Untha and old Goryat squatted at the well-curb, beside the empty leather horse-trough. They looked up as Withinga and Thorinn approached. Untha, who had been scratching the bare earth idly with his dagger, gaped witlessly, showing tusks as long as Thorinn's thumb. His narrow blue eyes, slitted like a goat's, stared at Thorinn as if he were a stranger.

Without speaking, Withinga sank down beside the other two. Squatting in a row, the three stared at Thorinn. Their massive, yellow-maned heads were on a level with his. Beyond them, the split sky arched over the rim of Hovenskar. At last Goryat spoke. "The well is broken."

"Did you call me down here to tell me that?" asked Thorinn in honest surprise.

"Hold your tongue and listen," said Goryat. "It comes to my mind that the well may be mend-

ed. Therefore, jump into it and see."

Thorinn hopped to the well-curb and looked down. The deep shaft receded into darkness, past the leather thong and the dim round shape of the bucket. He could not see the bottom.

"How shall we mend it?" he asked.

"With stones," grunted Withinga. "The fool asks; wise men must answer. Go down, Flea."

Thorinn bent toward the dark receding shaft, from which a faint cool breath arose; then a new thought struck him. "If this should be long in the doing," he said, "who will cook the dinner?"

The two brothers glanced at each other again, and Withinga stroked his chin with a taloned gray hand. "Well asked," he said grudgingly. "Also, who will fetch peat for the fire and tend the horses?"

"And milk the mares, supposing they turn fresh again, and make cheese?" put in Untha, scowling and toying with his dagger. "That is no work for a man."

Thorinn stared from one to the other, for their words made little sense; but Goryat said, "Peace," and gave them a hard look under his frosty brows. "Witlings have I for sons. The thing is decided." He turned to Thorinn. "Down with you, be quick."

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The three pairs of cold blue eyes were watching him. Thorinn hesitated uneasily; but Goryat's brows were drawing together in a way he knew. He shrugged, bent and picked up the bucket thong. He tugged at the end of it, where it was knotted around one of the stones of the curb, found it secure, and backed over the rim of the well-mouth, lowering himself hand under hand. The three yellow-maned heads turned to watch him. They disappeared over the rim of the well, but a moment later, as he descended, they came back into view, peering down. The three silhouetted figures seemed to rise and become foreshortened; the horizon sank; the ground bulged upward like water closing over his head. Clods and an occasional pebble, scraped loose by his feet, rebounded below. After a moment or two he heard something strike the bottom. Cold air breathed up past him. The edge of the leather bucket touched his thighs. Holding the thong with one hand, he pulled the bucket up free of his legs, hung a moment and dropped.

He was aware, as he fell, that his fall was unnaturally slow. That was because of the weight-loss that had come when Snorri began to rumble. The difference was not much, the tenth part perhaps of his eighty pounds, but

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why should the sound of Snorri have taken away even an ounce? They four had all had to learn to walk over again, for their steps were so long that they tripped and bloodied their noses. The horses also. And it was comical to watch, the birds had not learned even yet — their wing-thrashing when they tried to land carried them into the air again, over and over, and when they did finally succeed in reaching the ground, they bounced and rolled, squawking, wings disheveled, then staggered to their feet, looking thunderstruck

The bottom was near. Dimly he saw it, bent his knees, took the shock. But the bottom of the well was tipped beyond his expectation, and it threw him against the side, making his head ring.

He straightened himself and breathed deep. How cold it was down here! And no wonder, for the water they got from the well, before it went dry, had been cold as ice. That was natural, for the deeper you went, the farther from the warmth-giving sky. Thus it was colder here on the floor of the ancient ocean than it was in the Highlands; colder again at the bottom of the well; and if you could dig deeper still into the earth, eventually you would come to the land of eternal

ice, the Underworld, where Snorri ruled.

Thorinn crouched and felt for the source of the steady slow current that breathed up around his legs. Oddly, although the air was cool, it seemed warmer if anything than the earth and stones around him. His hands found an opening, half choked with mud. So far as he could tell, there had been a breaking of the rock table under the well, and he was now crouching on a tilted slab of it that had fallen and stuck.

He heard a sound, twisted to look up. The mouth of the well was a disk of brightness, surrounded by concentric half-circles of gray reflected light. The sound was repeated, and Thorinn saw a tiny black dot rise to the well-mouth, bob and disappear.

For a moment he could not believe it; then he stood hastily and shouted, "Hi! Don't pull up the bucket! How am I to get up?"

A maned head appeared, in silhouette against the sky, and looked down at him silently. It vanished; another appeared at a different place; then it, too, was gone. "Hi!" shouted Thorinn, hearing his voice boom up the shaft.

He listened. Over the slow sighing of the wind, a sound so familiar in Hovenskar that it was only when it changed, he caught the grumbling voice of Goryat.

"Lift your end! And hurry up."

Footsteps scraped on the pebbles beside the well-curb. Then something dark came into view and hung suspended in the middle of the disk. The broken circle of brightness around it flickered and vanished, the light down the well-walls turned gray and went out. A stony clang echoed down. The black air pressed close to Thorinn's eyes and seemed as heavy to breathe as water. There was a long pause, then another clang.

Thorinn's heart was leaping with fear, but he reached for his wallet calmly enough, found the wooden light-box and uncovered the window of mica at one end. The pale witchfire of the sky-stuff inside brought his arms back in ghostly dimness, and a vague circle of dirt wall. But though he shielded it with his hand, it would not reach the top of the shaft — no, nor even four ells above his head, where the leather bucket ought to be hanging on its thong, waiting for him to jump and catch it and pull himself back to the surface.

He waited, saying to himself, "It was a joke," but in his belly he knew better. Not for any prank would glum Goryat or his lazy sons have lifted those two great stones, the broken slabs left over from the roofing, which had lain half-sunken in the earth

beside the house for as long as Thorinn could remember, and laid them one atop another across the mouth of the well.

He listened. Dimly from above, vibrating through the slabs of stone, came the deep rising and falling tones of Goryat's voice. Though he could not make out the words, the rhythm was familiar. What was it? Then he knew: the invocation to Snorri, the one Goryat had chanted when they had sacrificed the horse.

It was neither joke nor mistake; they meant him to remain in the well.

II

The knowledge of his own death came like icy water into Thorinn's flesh. He leaned suddenly against the wall. All the things that had vaguely disturbed him before — the queer looks of Goryat and his sons, the odd things they had said — now became clear.

The men of Hovenskar lived by their horses. For the mares to go dry was a disaster. A prudent man does not offend the gods, and therefore Goryat had sacrificed a stallion. When Snorri refused the gift, what more natural than to offer a man instead?

But there had been no drawing of lots! The thing had been done by treachery; they had dealt
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with him like a stranger. Now he began to remember a thousand things: how they had always given him the hardest tasks and the scraps from the kettle. He was no son or brother to them — only a beast to live or die at their will.

The anger that flowed into him strengthened his limbs. Above, Goryat's voice still rumbled distantly through the stones over the well. He was not dead yet! He took a deep breath, another. The walls of earth around him were like a shirt laced too tight. He felt half smothered already, and yet he knew there was no lack of air. It was thirst that would kill him, and that would take days. To die of thirst in a well! Never mind, he had time, a precious gift — three or four days, perhaps, before he grew too weak.

What else? He had his short sword, really an old Yen-metal dagger of Goryat's, in its leather scabbard; the broad leather belt it hung from, which might be useful in climbing; his wallet and its contents, which he now examined — light-box, fire stick and tinder, a few crumbs of cheese, a strip of dried horse-meat and a few odds and ends, colored pebbles and the like, which he had picked up because he liked them. Then there were the clothes he wore, shirt and breeks of buckskin, horsehide shoes and the thongs that wrap-

ped his calves. A rope of sorts might be made of all these things together.

Thorinn shivered, staring up vainly into the darkness beyond his little light. Goryat's distant voice paused, then began again. To climb the well would be no great matter, hands on one side and feet on the other, inching his way up to the top. But there were two things not to be forgotten.

The first, that if hand or foot slipped, he would fall and crush his bones at the bottom. Then, if the fall should not kill him outright, his dying would be hard.

The second, that even if he reached the top safely, he could neither lift the stones nor dig under them as he lay across the well. He must think of a way to make a sort of platform near the top, on which he could stand while he dug with his sword . . .

But at this thought, he saw how hopeless his position was. For he had nothing to make such a platform of except the sword itself.

Cold and discouraged, Thorinn sat down on the floor of the well and hugged his knees for warmth. In the glow of the light-box, which he had placed on a stone beside him, he saw a sudden flutter in the air. Something small and gray had darted up

zigzag to vanish in the darkness.

Thorinn stared upward, mouth open, then snatched the light and raised it over his head.

At first he saw nothing. Then a small gray creature detached itself from the wall, spread a pair of membranous wings, and swooped erratically to the other side. It was a wingmouse, one of the darkness-loving creatures that sometimes flew out of the cave on the valley slope two leagues above. Where had it come from?

He turned the light on the opening at his feet. This was a narrow black gash at the side of the well, no more than a span in width. But he saw dimly now that it widened below, undercutting the wall.

Kneeling with his forehead pressed against the mud and pebbles, he was able to see a shelf of muddy earth a few ells below. It did not extend all the way under the opening, however, for he could just make out an edge of blackness on the near side — a second deeper hole. Twisting, he put his arm down as far as it would reach. He groped in every direction, without finding any other obstruction. Mud and pebbles, dislodged by his arm, cascaded slowly down into the darkness. The current of moist air was feeble but steady against his fingers; it seemed to rise straight toward him.

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Thorinn sat up, feeling his heart beat. Who cannot ride must walk, as the saying was. If he could not go up, perhaps he could go down! If he could somehow reach the cave of the wingmice, and get out to the surface again . . . : let Goryat and his sons beware.

He pulled out his sword, jabbed the point into the lip of earth over the opening. A wedge of dirt and stones came away and drifted down into the darkness; he listened, but did not hear it land. He pried loose another wedge, and another. When he had carved away enough of the shaft wall to admit his body, he paused and again looked down. This time, in the dim glow of the light-box, he could see a tumbled mass of muddy earth and stone, sloping downward like a funnel to a round black hole almost directly below him.

After a moment's thought, Thorinn unwrapped the thong from one leg of his breeks and tied it securely around the light-box. Kneeling again over the hole, he carefully lowered the box and swung it gently, until it was clear of the hole below, before he let it drop. He coiled up the thong and tossed it in after the box.

In darkness now except for the glow that came up through the

hole in the well-bottom, he stood and listened. Goryat's voice still rumbled overhead. He stared upward a moment silently in the darkness. Then he turned and lowered himself feet first into the hole.

He hung for an instant with his chest and elbows on the lip of the opening, then let himself slide. As he floated down, he kicked forward, then back, strongly, at the moment his hands touched the lip. He straightened his body as he fell, landed easily on the slope beside the second hole.

A few bits of mud and gravel that had fallen along with him went pattering down the shaft below. Thorinn picked up his light-box and looked around. He was in a cavern with sloping walls, an irregular ceiling and floor, the whole splashed with mud in fantastic shapes. It was tall enough and to spare for him to stand erect here, but it rose and grew shallower in every direction. He could no longer hear Goryat's voice.

Holding the light-box, he leaned over and looked down. Cool air blew steadily and slowly in his face. The shaft, like a smaller well, dropped almost straight for perhaps five or six ells; then it seemed to curve slightly. Thorinn saw the gleam of exposed stone at the lip and below that,

at no great distance, a faintly visible surface of which he could make out no details.

Thorinn hesitated, not liking the look of this second descent. But the flow of air decided him. He unwrapped the thong from his other leg, tied it to its fellow: this gave him a rope nearly four ells in length. To this he added his belt for another ell.

He lowered the light-box carefully and this time had to lean down with his arm at full stretch before he saw the box touch bottom. It was mud and stones down there as well. He could see no more than that. He let the thong drop, watched it fall in coils below.

He was too cautious to drop the sword. Instead, he held it flat to his thigh as he stepped off and fell, slowly at first, then faster, braking his descent a little with elbows and feet. He brought his feet together at the right moment, landed on the curving jut of rock at the lip. Pebbles and dirt rattled slowly down past him. He stood, turned lowered himself the small remaining distance. Crouching, for there was no headroom here, he picked up the light-box and carefully brushed away the clods and gravel that had fallen on it. Then he looked around. The low dirt ceiling, porous and stained reddish-brown in places, formed an irregular dome; this

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cavern was long and narrow. Here, too, ceiling, walls and floor were mud-splashed. Stones bigger than his head lay as if tossed about. The mound of mud and stones on which he crouched sloped away, channeled and rutted. In one direction it disappeared under a great tilted stone, leaving an opening no more than a span high; in the other across a wide pit which had drawn off the water like a funnel, the cavern stretched away level into the darkness.

Thorinn methodically wrapped the thongs around his calves again, cleaned his belt as well as he could and put it on, then hung his sword from it. Crouching low on the slope, he wet his finger and held it first over the pit, then as far as he could reach toward the far end of the cavern. There was a current of air from both directions, though that from the pit was the stronger. Thorinn had no wish to go deeper, so he straddled the pit, clambered over and began inching his way along the level passage.

After he had gone a few ells, the passage widened and the floor began to drop away sharply. The ceiling at first dipped down overhead as he descended, forcing him to crouch even more; then it leveled out abruptly, and he found himself able to stand erect.

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Just over his head, tongues of some crusty reddish material hung from the ceiling. Thorinn tugged at one curiously and found that it was metal, rusted so thin that it broke in his hand. Below, the tunneled mound grew shallower and seemed to end in a level floor, with a few scattered boulders.

Thorinn moved downward again. Here ceiling and walls formed one almost unbroken curve; it was as if he were in the bore of some giant earthworm, filled in with earth to half its depth.

As he moved forward, the patches of rusty metal overhead grew larger and closer together, and he recognized others, twisted and broken, among the heaped earth and stones at his feet. Farther away, the arched roof of the tunnel glinted silvery through the rust. Thorinn moved along one wall, examining it as he went, and at last stopped in incredulous wonder. Between the dots and patches of rust, wall and floor alike gleamed with the silver-gray luster. The tunnel was lined with Yen-metal, the incorruptible. Yet it had rusted away to nothing in places! How long had it been here, empty and unknown under the earth?

The hair on the back of his neck began to prickle. He turned, swinging the light-box around.

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Something hunched and gray darted behind a stone. The long shadow swallowed it.

Thorinn cast the light this way and that, but saw nothing more. His heart was knocking in his chest. He held his breath, heard nothing. The thing he had glimpsed had been half the size of a man, coarse-furred, running low to the ground.

Thinking hard, he walked on a few paces, then paused and laid the light-box down. He dropped to one knee, as if examining the thong around his calf. His fingers plucked the knot loose; holding the thong in one hand, he seized the light-box in the other and pivoted.

Another gray-furred shape darted behind a stone. This time it had been nearer.

Thorinn clenched his teeth to stop his jaw's trembling. Inside, he felt calm and cold; it was his body that was afraid. Holding the light-box under one arm, he made a sliding-knot in one end of the thong.

This was an extremely dangerous moment, for both hands were occupied as he fastened the light-box to his forearm. He made a second loop at the other end of the box, drew it tight, tested it and found it firm.

He swung the light around again, turning as he walked, but saw nothing.

He realized abruptly that his ears, tuned to the faint slithers and squeaks around him, for some time had been hearing another sound: the distant, steady rush of water. He raised the light-box awkwardly head-high, but there was nothing in that direction, only the tumbled waste of earth, stones and rubble.

He followed the sound, hoping for some advantage from any change. The current of air grew stronger, the water sound louder. Dancing ahead, at last the glow of the light-box picked up a pale gleam in the earth. It was the far side of a great hole, ten ells across, that went down out of sight in undulating level stripes of brown and cream-colored stone.

It was not the place he would have chosen; but at least, if he stood with the chasm at his back, the beasts could not attack from behind. He went closer, feeling uneasy. This might be the river Dan that disappeared into the ground three leagues from Goryat's steading; or perhaps it was the water that had escaped from the well, now rushing here underground toward some deeper chasm . . .

He stepped cautiously up to the lip, cast his light this way and that, then tilted it down and risked a glance. Deep down, beyond the smooth-cut lip of stone,

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the water rushed by smooth and fast. His light was too feeble to show more than the surface, but he knew that it was deep. The sound that came up out of the hole was partly the whispering rush of water, partly something else — a distant, hollow roar. He realized the sound had grown so loud that it might be difficult to hear any stealthy noises behind him.

He turned, sweeping the light around, just in time to see a dark shape spread-eagled in the air before him. He saw the sharp snout, the pinkish-gray inside of the mouth gaping behind the long teeth, the outstretched dirty hands like a man's. He struck clumsily with his sword, felt the jolt in his wrist, heard the thing shriek like a gutted horse. Two more were leaping at him from left and right. He stumbled backward, swinging wildly — the sword-tip touched one of the beasts in mid-leap, and there was another scream.

Two hard bodies struck him, and he was down on his back, rolling, breathing their moldy stench. Cold pain slashed his cheek and arms. He realized dimly that it could happen; one could be killed, without time for more surprise than this A sharper pain stabbed his breast, making him cry out. His free hand was on the creature's coarse-furred THE WORLD AND THORINN

throat, forcing it back, and in the stifled glow of the light-box he saw the snarling mouth with its tongue like a dry worm, the round, eyeless head. Then the stones under him dropped away, and he was falling.

Below him the water *roared*.

III

It was the distant, roaring of the water that brought him up out of darkness. He was sprawled on wet stone, retching feebly. His legs were still in the water, which lapped at his middle rhythmically and insistently, over and over in the same place. When he tried to crawl out of its reach, he found his legs too heavy to move. He belched up a watery surge of vomit against the stone. After a while, groaning, he managed to drag himself an ell or so away from the water and roll onto his back.

The light-box was still clinging to his arm, but its glow was so feeble that he could barely make it out. When he looked up, the darkness pressed close against his open eyes. The sound of the water roared endlessly, off in the distance. The sound was hollow, echoing.

He started, remembering coarse-furred stinking bodies, stabbing teeth . . . his hand went to the pain in his breast and

found the leather shirt pierced as if by needles. He could remember the water plunging up over his head, the helpless motion, the falling

His right hand lay empty against the stone. The sword was gone, of course.

After an interval, some faint sound in the darkness brought him struggling up on one elbow. He listened with shock trembling along his nerves, but the sound was not repeated; he heard only the steady, tumultuous roaring of the water.

On his right cheekbone there was a lump of a thumb's thickness. Three deep slashes, still welling blood, curved down his cheek and neck. The pain in his breast was as sharp as if the needle-teeth still gripped him there, and he found himself running his fingers over the pierced leather to reassure himself.

A touch told him that the light-box was ruined. One end was split, the mica missing and all the sky-stuff washed out of the compartment except a few shreds clinging to the soaked wood. The dim glow came from these.

The knots in the wet thong were too much for his fingers. At length he attacked them with his teeth, jerking at them with desperate stubbornness until they loosened enough to slip the light-box free. Holding it with care in

both hands, he pried the wooden cap off the other end. The mica here was still whole.

He unlatched the lid, raised it and probed delicately in the second compartment. It was half full of chill water, in which he could feel the sodden sky-stuff afloat.

Thorinn let out the breath he had been holding. He fumbled over the stone with his free hand until he found a hollow place. He tilted the box over it, pressing the skystuff against the inside of the compartment and straining the water out between his fingers.

He remembered that he must put aside a portion of the dark sky-stuff. He unfastened his wallet and tipped the water out of it, then pinched up a good lump of sky-stuff between thumb and finger, and laid it carefully at the bottom of the wallet.

Now, if there was enough of the bright sky-stuff left Thorinn scraped the inside of the ruined compartment with his forefinger, brought it up with the fingernail dimly glowing, and touched it firmly to the sodden mass of sky-stuff in the other half of the box. The moss bloomed into pale light, dim but beautiful to his eyes.

He shut the lid carefully upon it, then aimed the mica end of the box this way and that

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around him. He was sitting on a smooth flat rock that sloped gently down to the water and ran away featureless into the darkness on every other side.

Now that he had light, his first care was to recover the few strands of sky-stuff that had escaped between his fingers when he poured the water out. He dipped them up out of the puddle one by one, dried them as best he could by shaking them gently and deposited them in the box again.

Next he thought of his hurts. Dark sky-stuff, moistened and bound to a wound, was said to be healing; but he had none to spare, nor any other medicines.

He climbed stiffly to his feet. His sopping garments clung to him. His shoes squelched when he took a step. Even his hair dripped cold down the back of his neck. He turned toward the distant roaring sound and slowly began to walk along the edge of the water, holding the light-box ahead of him.

After ten steps a black wall of rock gleamed out of the darkness. It went nearly to the water and rose overhead farther than his little light would reach. He turned away from the water, up the slope. After a few steps the stone on which he had been walking ended and gave way to other slabs, more uneven, higher and

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of a smaller size, while the wall curved gradually back, away from the roaring sound, until it ran parallel with the water.

In thirty paces more, Thorinn came to a head-high shelf on which some leathery fans of fungus grew. He pulled them down, found them white and doughy inside, with a strong stale odor. He nibbled at one, found it palatable and then, such was his hunger, ate all the rest and looked for more. But he found no others of that size, only a mass of larger ones joined together in long rows, dead and just as hard as spearwood.

He turned away in disappointment, but after a moment, thinking better of it, went back and broke loose some of the dead fungus. It came away in a long staff, like a loaf of bread. He examined the inner surface closely in the glow of the light-box. It was porous and tinder-dry. Insects had tunneled through it, leaving portions of the mass so eaten away that they collapsed under his thumb.

Thorinn felt a spark of excitement. He knelt on the cold stone, opened his wallet and got out his fire stick. The tinder was a sodden mass of fiber. Thorinn untied it and spread it out on the stone; it might dry enough to be of use, he supposed, but it would take days.



He dried his hands as well as he could by rubbing them along the rock, then picked up the staff of fungus again and began to break off small pieces. But his touch dampened them in spite of all he could do, and at last he broke the staff into two parts and began rubbing the ends together to grind off chunks and fragments. When he had a pile of these, he laid the rest of the fungus aside and picked up his fire stick. Like everything else he owned it was wet, but the plunger still slid freely enough in the cylinder. Thorinn took it apart and shook a few drops of moisture out of it. Then, holding it braced against the stone between his legs, he sat patiently driving the plunger in, over and over, until the cylinder grew warm to the touch and the inside was dry.

He opened the fire stick then, wedged the cylinder upright into a crack in the stone and used two shreds of fungus like fingers to pick up other shreds, preserving their dryness, and drop them into the fire stick. He put the plunger in, drove it down smartly, removed it. The shreds of fungus were glowing bright orange.

He tipped them out carefully into a pile of the finest fragments and dust of the fungus. They glowed for a moment more, then went out.

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On the third try, the little fire caught. Thorinn protected it with his cupped hands, blew gently on it, fed it sparingly with tiny splinters, then with bigger ones, and at last had whole chunks and staffs of fungus blazing yellow.

The yellow light danced high, reflecting glints from the shelving rock wall for a distance of five or six ells, before it vanished into shadow. Peering up between his cupped hands, Thorinn thought he could make out a vague glimmer that might be the ceiling, far overhead.

He crouched to the fire, soaking up warmth greedily with hands and face, then stripped off his soaked clothing and stood near the flames, turning himself like meat on a spit until at length he was dry and warm. The blood that welled slowly from the wounds in his chest began to clot.

Feeling stronger, Thorinn walked along the wall of rock collecting more staffs of fungus, which he piled near the fire; then he turned his shirt and breeks inside out and sat down to dry them. He emptied his wallet, putting the lump of sky-moss carefully aside in a cranny of the rock and examining the rest of his belongings for the first time to make sure they were safe. He laid his possessions out carefully on the rock and propped the

wallet open to dry along with his shoes.

The leather of his shirt steamed and turned a lighter brown. He pulled it right side out again and put it on, then the breeks. They were not thoroughly dry, but they were warm inside. They would have to do. He chose a long, heavy staff of fungus, laid one end of it in the heart of the fire. His shoes were wet as ever, but he put them on, gathered his possessions into the wallet and hung it from his belt.

By this time the end of the fungus staff was blazing, and he lifted it out of the fire. Yellow flames continued to curl around its tip, and when he held it overhead shading his eyes, it cast a ruddy light that made the cavern visible for a dozen ells or more on every side.

The rock wall rose in one receding shelf after another back into the shadows. Tipping his head back now, Thorinn could make out the broken rock surface of the cavern's ceiling, dim in the distance. But although he walked down to the edge of the water and held the torch high, he could not see the other side — only the dark, glassy, faintly moving surface of the water and the dim slope of the bottom under it, shelving down into darkness.

He turned away from the roar-

ing sound and followed the edge of the water in the other direction. The rock wall curved closer, became broken and covered with gray nodules of fungus; the stone shelf underfoot narrowed until there was barely room to walk, then gave way to heaped boulders. The thunderous roaring receded behind him, but another water-sound rose ahead. Holding his light out over the water, he saw the gleam of a swift current.

Now the ceiling began to dip lower. Thorinn was picking his way from one water-rounded boulder to another at the foot of the sheer face of rock. The ceiling curved down, the shelf broadened out again into two flat stones . . . and between them the water ran in a curved dark torrent, brilliant as glass, into a narrow slot of darkness under the wall.

On the other side of the outlet, the shelf broadened again, and behind it was a tumbled mass of boulders. Thorinn hesitated. The gap was only three ells across, half again his own height, but the thought of falling into that dark water made his knees turn weak.

He screwed up his courage, leaped and landed safely.

As well as he could judge, the cavern at this end was some twenty or thirty ells broad, and the ceiling might be as much as

thirty ells high in the center. On this side, the ceiling slanted sharply down to the talus slope of boulders at the base of which he stood. Fungi grew here and there on some of the larger stones. Thorinn picked all the smaller ones he saw, ate some and put the rest into his wallet. He found another long staff of dead fungus and tore it down for a spare torch.

The roaring grew louder as he circled the lake. Out across the dark water, an orange spark leaped into view: it was his fire, on the other side. He watched it for what seemed like a long time, until it abruptly winked out again, and he realized he had passed the wall of rock that jutted out to the water.

His torch was burning low. He paused to light the second one, and in its brighter flare, something white and vast rose out of the darkness.

The roaring filled the cavern now as he moved closer; it stuffed his ears with noise. He shouted and could not hear himself. The air was full of flying droplets, drifting in fairy arcs, winking and vanishing. The white water dropped thunderously into the lake, bursting into white mounds of spray. Thorinn could dimly make out the shapes of rocks like giants' skulls behind the curtain of water. He could not see the

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top of it, and his torch was smoking and dimming now as he tried to move nearer. The wet air was putting it out. Thorinn retreated until the torch burned brightly again, then began to climb the heaped boulders, working his way toward the waterfall.

The air was less damp at this height, and he was able to approach within twenty ells or so of the cataract. He was halfway up the cavern wall now, and the boulders would take him no higher. He raised the torch. The dim light glimmered back from a hole in the rocky ceiling, from which the torrent sprang out greenish-white and curved into space.

One look, and he knew he could never get back up the way he had come down.

IV

As he sat on a boulder, his eye was caught by a tiny glimmer of brightness under the dark water, far off toward the middle of the lake. He stared at it under his hand, and in a moment was almost sure that it was his lost sword. But it might as well have been at a thousand leagues' distance for all the good it was to him. Indeed, it seemed likely that he would never need it again.

Weariness took him as he sat, and he began to think how good
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it would be to lie and rest, near the fire for comfort, though indeed, except for his wet shoes and breeks, he was comfortable enough. The air in this cavern was cool and fresh; there was no wind Here he began confusedly to imagine that the cavern had the ceaseless wind of Hoven-skar blowing through it and that the gray-maned horses were lifting their heads beyond Goryat's stone-roofed house, which somehow was all mingled with the wall of the cavern, and the smoke as it rose from the smokehole leaning crooked in the air

He came to himself with a start, to realize that he had all but dropped the smoldering torch out of his hand. The torch was half out, a black stub crawling with fire-worms. It's thin, acrid smoke drifted aslant.

Thorinn's head rose to follow it. Indeed, since the air was fresh, there must be some way for it to come into the cavern! The two holes that he knew of were both filled by the moving water. Therefore there must be others.

Stung to wakefulness, he rose and began to climb, following the dim path of the smoke from his torch. Questing along the top of the heap of boulders, in a few minutes he found a crevice in the wall into which a faint current of air was moving. But the crevice was no bigger than his fist.

His torch threatened to go out. He went looking for another, found it and took up the search again, working his way back the way he had come. He found two more crevices no larger than the first, then a fourth an ell in length but thinner than a finger.

At the lower end of the cavern, where great slabs of the ceiling had fallen and lay heaped all anyhow, the thin smoke of his torch eddied and drifted. Stooping to peer between two slabs, Thorinn felt cool air breathing on his face. He held the torch nearer, singeing his hair in his excitement.

Behind the rock slabs, an irregular passage ran away into the earth. It was two ells high to begin with and seemed to grow larger as it went. Thorinn put one arm in, tried to follow it with his head, but could not.

He drew back, panting, and examined the boulders. The smaller of the two was half buried by a clutter of other stones. The larger lay almost free on the slope, supported only at its lower end by another slab. Thorinn got his fingers around the edge of the large stone, braced himself and pulled, without effect. He tried again, nearer the top, but it was no use. The stone weighed as much as a horse.

He rested, feeling weak from hunger and exertion. The wounds

in his chest had opened and were bleeding again. If he only had a lever, a pole, anything, to pry the larger slab up and out, away from its support at the bottom!

A thought came into his mind, but he pushed it aside. Never mind. Where there was one such passage there must be others. He smeared the stone with the stub of his old torch to mark it and patiently went on searching. He leaped the gap at the lake's outlet, circled back to his starting point.

His fire was gray ash and embers. He built it up again, then began to climb the terraces that sloped away behind. The rock wall here was full of promising oval shadows, but every one turned out to be no more than a niche in the rock.

He made the whole circuit of the cavern once more before he was sure.

There was no possible exit from the cavern except the one. He must somehow move that stone.

He remembered his glimpse of the sword, dim yellow under the water. If he could only get it back, that would be his lever. But the thought of going into that dark water turned him cold inside, and he pushed it away a second time.

He prowled uselessly around

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the heap of boulders for a while, then went down to the water's edge and stared out over the black surface. The thought came back insistently. Lost in the darkness, the cataract roared. It had been roaring there, he supposed, since before he was born, and would go on roaring long after he had left his bones beside the lake.

Thorinn swallowed hard, turned and walked toward the cataract, gathering dead fungus as he went. When the white mountains of spray showed in the light of his torch, he turned and began to climb.

At the spot where the sword gleamed up at him from the bottom of the lake, he made a fire on the flat top of a boulder. He climbed down the slope a few ells, and made another fire; then he climbed up again to verify that the two fires, one behind another, pointed toward the sword in the lake.

Grimly, thinking of the cold clasp of the water, he climbed down the slope and stood at the lake. The water was as shallow here as on the other side, but it shelved away rapidly until within a few ells the light of his torch could no longer reach the bottom.

Thorinn took off his shoes and breeks, then his belt and wallet, and laid them on a stone. The air was cool on his bare skin. He

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stepped into the water, wincing. The stone was slippery. He took another step and was ankle-deep; another, calf-deep; another, cautiously, and his leg went in to the knee; there was no bottom under his foot.

He staggered back, trying to turn. His foot went out from under him, and the cold water choked off his yell.

Smothered, gasping, he floundered up to shore again. He had tried to hold the torch above water as he fell, but the splash had put it out. He was wet all over, as wet as he had been before.

Some while later, hugging his misery, he sat staring out over the dark water. He had tried the other side and had found it as deep as this one. Another, more skilled or courageous than he, would have had the sword by now, while he must stay and die here for the want of it.

The sword lay on the bottom, not more than fifteen ells from where he sat. But it was too deep for wading; he could not swim; there was no boat, or anything to build one. If only the lake were solid rock

Thorinn straightened and sat up. In his mind, he saw a level road of stones under the water, straight to where the sword lay. His heart bounded. He turned,

scanning the slope in the dim firelight for stones of a proper size. There were plenty of them, slabs level on top and bottom, about half an ell in thickness.

The first three went easily enough; he laid them in a straight line out into the water, half an ell under the surface, so that when he walked on them, the water came only to his knees. The fourth was harder to carry. The fifth, though it was no bigger than the others, he could not even lift higher than his shanks. He staggered out with it nevertheless, dropped it in place, lurched back to shore.

He rested, built up his two fires above on the slope and grimly went back to work. As the causeway lengthened, instead of one stone he must put down two, one atop the other, to bring the topmost within half an ell of the surface. His first stones he had laid a span apart, but since he had begun to pile them one on another, each column must lean against the one before it, or it would fall. Even so, more than once the second stone slid off the first, either when he laid it down or when he tried to walk upon it.

Then the bottom grew deeper still, and three stones in each column were needed. Three times he tried to build a column of three stones, and three times it collapsed. Thorinn splashed back

to the shore cursing, and flung himself down on the cold stone trembling with weariness. But he got up again and laid two stones for a foundation, then one above, and a fourth stone on that. In this way he built another column, and another.

Time passed. The fires burnt low, and he built them up again. Looking down from the height he could see his stone path straggling out into the water, less than halfway toward its goal.

He lay down again to rest, dropped into exhausted sleep, and woke from dreams of eyeless goblins to find himself cold and in the dark. His fires had gone out. He collected fungus, drank a little water from the lake, relieved himself behind a boulder.

The columns now must be four stones high: two stones, then two more above, then one, then one more. When he had built one such column of six stones, his arms were like lead, his breath burning his chest. It was impossible to go on. He lay cursing himself feebly, then got up and began another column.

Now time had stopped, and there was only the pain of his labor. He counted the columns, and there were nineteen. The twentieth must be five stones high: he built it in courses of three stones, then two, then two,

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then one, and one. So with the next, and the next. Each time he climbed the slope for more stones, he could look down at the causeway and judge whether it was holding to the right direction or not. He slept and ate again.

The twenty-sixth column was six courses tall — four stones, then three, three, two, two and one: fifteen stones, to advance his causeway the width of one stone. After another dazed interval, he counted the columns again, and there were twenty-nine.

Thorinn trudged back along his underwater causeway. He pulled his torch out of a crevice, waded back out across the tops of the columns. He held the torch trembling over his head, peered down. There it was! Deep down, straight ahead, glimmering golden under the water.

With tears of weakness starting from his eyes, Thorinn went back to shore, wedged the torch into its crevice again, climbed the slope for more rocks. He built his last column carefully — four stones, then four more, then three, three, three, two and two. The final course came above the surface of the water. Thorinn went back for a torch, wedged it in between the two topmost stones, and he stared below.

The sword gleamed up at him out of darkness as though it were

near enough to touch. He could see the wooden handle carved for a close grip, the dull place where the tang went into the hand-guard, the bright double edge. It lay on the smooth rock bottom among a few pebbles, waiting.

Thorinn tied one end of his thong around one of the topmost stones, the other around his waist. His hands were like wood. He climbed gingerly down and around the last column, groping for footholds. The cold water stung his wounds. The water surged, lifted at his body, trying to upend and drown him. He clung desperately to the end of the causeway, pressed his cheek hard against the stone. What remained was such a little thing — to climb down another ell or so, take the sword, climb up again into the air.

Thorinn filled his lungs, squeezed his eyes shut, lowered himself into the water. Water was in his eyes, his ears, blinding and deafening; the water lifted him, swung him helplessly while he struggled for his life. His hands found the thong. He pulled, came up choking and gasping.

He climbed up wearily and sat shivering on the end of the causeway.

Such a little thing — but he could not do it. In the torchlight, the sword gleamed up at him defiantly.

The trouble was, perhaps, that he had tried to climb down the wall of stones as if it were in air, but the unfamiliar buoyancy of the water had tricked him and thrown him off balance. Then caution itself was his enemy. He must throw himself boldly into the water, let himself sink to the bottom, trusting the thong — then take the sword and pull himself back to safety.

It was harder to do it than to think of it. Twice he tried to throw himself off, twice his muscles refused him. At last he climbed down until the water was up to his chest, then closed his eyes as before and lunged forward.

At once he found himself choked, floundering, turning. He could neither sink nor rise. He pulled himself out again, coughing, spewing up water.

He sat on his causeway and looked back at the length of it, dimly shining under water in the torchlight. What bitterness it would be to be defeated after such labors! But without the art of swimming, he could not move under water, even such a little distance. The treacherous stuff would not even let him sink.

A thought came to him, and he stood up wearily, looking down at the stones of the causeway. He bent, seized one of them half under the water and hoisted it out,





grunting with effort. The wet stone weighed nearly as much as he did, and in his weakness he could barely hold it. Surely, if he threw himself into the water again, carrying such a stone in his arms, he *must* sink!

He gave himself no time to consider. As he climbed awkwardly around the last column, he slipped, felt himself falling. The water leaped past him. The stone was dragging him down; water was in his eyes, nose, ears He felt a blow against his knuckles, knew he was on the bottom. His grip loosened and his body floated backward, but he seized the stone again. His lungs were bursting. He forced his eyes

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open, saw a stinging blur, a gleam. Holding the stone with one hand, he reached out desperately, felt his fingers close around wood and metal.

Somehow he found the thong with his other hand, pulled, rose. He burst into air, breathed — he was alive! The sword, the sword —

His heavy arm came up. And in his hand, streaming water, lay the bright metal.

V

Levered upward, the heavy slab trembled, moved a finger's breadth, then began to slide. Thorinn pulled the sword out of

the way and leaped back. Turning majestically, the slab rumbled down the slope in a dancing cloud of smaller stones. It struck a boulder halfway down, tilted, came to rest. Stones pattered and fell silent. A haze of dust particles hung in the air.

Thorinn examined his sword anxiously, but the hard Yen-metal had taken no hurt. The point was as sharp and straight as ever, and the double edge was not even nicked.

Cool air breathed past him into the exposed passageway. In the light of the torch, it was curved, lusterless, smooth-walled, unequal in cross section — tapering almost to a point at ceiling and floor. It sloped gently upward out of sight.

Thorinn turned for one last look out into the darkness of the cavern. He had slept, rested, eaten all he could hold of the young fungus he had gathered. The rest — there was little enough — was in his wallet, and he had tied on his back a bundle of the long woody staves for torches.

He entered the passage and gingerly began to work his way up it in the flickering torchlight. For the first twenty ells or so it was not bad. Then the passage narrowed so sharply that he had to crawl, pushing the torch ahead of him and dragging his burdens behind. The passage turned and

twisted like a **serpent**, this way and that, **now left, now right**. With each upward **turn** Thorinn's spirits rose; but at last the passage took a definite downward slope.

He had used seven torches, and the last was half-burned when the passage abruptly widened again. Thorinn crawled out into a black echoing space — another cavern, much smaller than the last. The opposite wall gleamed in the torchlight, streaked and knobbed with some glassy substance that seemed to have melted like tallow and hardened again on the stone. But when he touched it, it was the stone itself. What fire could have melted the living rock like a candle?

A trickle of water came from somewhere above and dripped from the bottommost knob with a melancholy sound. Thorinn cupped his palm under it and drank a sip, but it was bitter.

He held his torch up, marveling. At the far end of the cavern he found two level passageways, one opposite the other, as if they were parts of a single tunnel that happened to intersect the cavern. Thorinn took the left-hand branch. His last torch burned his fingers, and he dropped it. He kept going, using the light-box. Almost at once the passage widened, the ceiling rose and became a dome three ells high. In the

middle of the passageway lay something enormous, circular and dark.

Thorinn stared at it suspiciously. It made no move; neither did it have any eyes or limbs, so far as he could see. He ventured to touch it. It had the chill hardness of iron; it was wrought metal, the largest piece he had ever seen — like a giant's shield, ten spans across, having a circular hole pierced in it of three spans' width. This hole was not in the center of the shield but to one side; through it he could see the brown, scuffed floor of the passage.

He knelt and laid his palm curiously on the metal near the rim of the hole. And the massive shield turned under his hand as if it were afloat.

Thorinn sprang back, hand to his sword. But the shield was slowly rotating upon some hidden pivot, returning to its former place. When the hole was where it had been before, it stopped.

A second time Thorinn bent forward, put his hand on the shield and felt it turn. When he took his hand away, it swung slowly back to rest.

Thorinn settled back on his haunches and stared at the shield. He liked it very little. What could it be doing here, a thing apparently shaped by man, yet

so cunningly pivoted that it seemed to have no weight? Surely it must be some springe or man-trap set by demons.

As he hesitated, a sound came to his ears — the faintest of whispering or rustling noises; it seemed to come from beneath the shield. Cautiously he bent nearer.

The sound died away, then returned. It was a sound like that of some small creature crawling, scraping along in the space under the shield . . . no, not like that, but like some sound that he knew. It was a sound that made him think of Hovenskar . . . Then he had it: wind in the grasses.

The thing was impossible. Yet the more he listened, the more sure he grew. Using the tip of his scabbard, he prodded the shield. Under the circular hole, brown rock moved past, then a sudden glint of brightness. The wind sound grew louder; a warm breath of air arose. The bright lozenge expanded to a cramped circle, then filled up the hole.

Thorinn's breath had stopped. He was looking down into depths of silver light and brown-green shadow. There were stripes of darker brown, diminishing in a curiously painful way. At last he realized that they were tree trunks, gnarled and huge, that dropped darkening through space until they were tiny as needles' ends at the bottom.

It was the Midworld down there; somehow in his wanderings down through the cavern, he had got above it, for there it lay below him.

His luck was incredible! Moreover, this must be the Highlands. Deep as it was, the gulf below him was nothing like so deep as the sky above Hovenskar.

His mind was busy with the problem of reaching one of those

giant trees and clambering down. It would be difficult and dangerous, but in this moment of happiness he had no doubt that he would succeed. There it all was below him, the land he had dreamed of. In a few moments he would be standing there, breathing free; and the life he had counted lost once more would begin.

— DAMON KNIGHT



FORECAST

The next issue of *Galaxy* marks one of the happier occasions of our career.

To begin with, we've got some good stories for you. Harlan Ellison is with us, with a piece called *The Beast That Shouted "Love!"*! Damon Knight has another "Thorinn" novelette, taking up the tale of his far-future adventurer as he emerges from the caverns and finds himself in *The Garden of Ease* — lovely world, where no one ever needs work, and those who do find themselves not only outcasts but definitely injurious to all around them. And, of course, we'll have the conclusion of Cliff Simak's *Goblin Reservation*, about which we have few reservations. (It's his first long one in *Galaxy* since *Gather the Stars*. That one won him a Hugo, and we wouldn't be surprised to find this one in competition for the next set of Hugos.) The rest of the issue isn't quite as definite yet — depends on how the type sets — but it looks like we'll have a John Brunner, a Brian W. Aldiss, very likely another Ross Rocklynne, and of course the usual first-rate contributions by Willy Ley and Algis Budrys.

But what makes the June issue of *Galaxy* special in our book isn't the stories, but the fact that will be the last bi-monthly issue — or the first monthly issue — well, figure it how you will: with the next issue *Galaxy* goes monthly again. Same price. Same size. Same quality. Same all-star lineup of authors. The only difference is that from now we'll be doing it twelve times a year instead of six. And enjoying every minute of it.

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By J. D. Ratcliff

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